THE SAVIOR AS ST. MATTHEW SAW HIM

HAGGENEY

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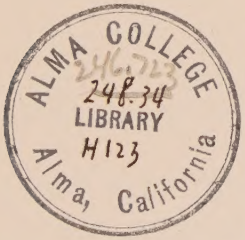
THE SAVIOR
AS SAINT MATTHEW SAW HIM

MEDITATIONS ON THE FIRST GOSPEL FOR THE USE OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

BY THE
REV. FRANCIS J. HAGGENEY, S.J.

VOLUME III

Israel's Response to Christ's Invitation



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AN OBSTINATE PEOPLE

THE subject matter of this volume comprises the second division of the first part of St. Matthew's gospel, in which the Evangelist describes the reception accorded to the message and the person of Christ by the people of Israel (see Vol. I, page 24). We see the Lord bending every effort to win the people; but despite their spiritual aridity and wretchedness, they remain aloof. Christ attempts to win them over by sending His Apostles to preach in His stead; but the vast majority, even of the Galileans, maintain their aloofness. They justify the epithet, "a stiff-necked people," which Moses gave the nation more than a thousand years before (Ex. 33,5). The hostility of the leading classes becomes more pronounced and the common people do not free themselves from their baneful influence, but remain undecided between the Savior and the Sanhedrin. The situation reaches a climax when the Scribes ask the Lord to work a sign in the heavens, and He not only refuses their insolent demand, but to some extent turns away from Israel.

While in the preceding volume the great doctrines of Christ formed the main topic, in the present His personality, both as the gracious Redeemer and the severe Judge, stands out very prominently.

The Evangelist divides his subject into two parts, ———the Prospects for the Kingdom of God in Israel (9,36–11,1), and the Personal Experiences of Christ (11,2–12,45).

Part I

The Prospects of the Kingdom of God in Israel

Meditation 1

The Distressing Condition of the People

(Matt. 9,36–38)

"And seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them: because they were distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth laborers into His harvest."

In these words Christ intended to rouse the compassion and zeal of His disciples by calling their attention to the spiritual destitution of their fellow-Israelites, and thus prepare them for choosing twelve among their number to become Apostles.

Let us entreat the grace of being chosen by God for gathering a rich harvest of souls.

1. The misery of the people. "And seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them; because they

were distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd." In these words we can discern traces of the address which Christ on this occasion made to His Apostles about the condition of the people and which He concluded with an admonition to pray for laborers in the harvest. The Greek text brings out the pathos vibrating through His words: "because they were badly cut and lay around helpless like sheep when they have lost their shepherd." In the preceding volumes we have seen to some extent how they were "cut badly" by the monstrous doctrines of the Rabbis, the exactions and the religious tyranny of the Pharisees; and how "they lay around helpless like sheep which have lost their shepherd," because the Sadducean priesthood neglected their sacred duty of instructing them and, wholly devoid of the proper spirit, scandalized them by their way of living and the mercenary spirit which dominated their performance of the sacred functions. In consequence, thousands fell into the hands of religious deceivers and apocalyptical visionaries. Weak, sore, and helpless, they dragged themselves along or lay at the roadside, starving for the spiritual food and lacking strength to rise. Such was the picture the Savior drew for His disciples to rouse their compassion and urge them on to active and generous help.

Applications. 1) Despite the results achieved during nineteen centuries, the picture which our Lord then painted for His disciples remains true to this very day. For as yet only one-third of mankind calls itself

Christian, and of those who glory in this appellation only a little more than one-half deserve the title, because the rest live in heresy, schism, superstition, and infidelity or indifferentism. How many are there, moreover, amongst Catholics who are badly cut by the wounds of sin, evil passions, and religious ignorance. As the Apostles had to come to a realization of the spiritual sufferings of Israel, so we must have a full understanding of the sad plight of so many souls in this twentieth century. The disciples, moreover, were not to indulge in barren sentiments of pessimism and useless feelings of indignation against those who caused all the misery, but to conceive ardent desires and a firm determination to help the poor people out of their plight. In like manner the realization of the spiritual condition of millions in the world of today must not lead us to unprofitable criticisms and sterile lamentations, but urge us by prayer, instruction, and other means to co-operate in the work of the Church. We say advisedly: "to co-operate in the work of the Church"; for as Christ intended by His appeal to render the disciples willing and anxious to have a share in His labors, and not to work aloof, each according to his own idiosyncrasies, so we must work for souls under the direction of the Church, guided by her spirit and authority.

2) Christ here teaches us also how to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. We must explain the needs of souls not only to young people

who are able to take up apostolic work, but to adults as well, to parents and relatives. We must create an apostolic atmosphere around the old as well as the young; for it is the former who frequently put the greatest difficulties in the way of securing laborers for the harvest of the Lord. If we withhold our appeal to parents and relatives until the prospective candidates acquaint them with their intention of taking an active part in God's apostolate, we have conjured up difficulties which with a little foresight could have been avoided.

II. THE FEWNESS OF LABORERS. "Then he saith to his disciples, The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few." Christ uses the comparison of the harvest in two different significations. Sometimes, but not in the present case, He designates by it the result produced in men by the use of the graces of Redemption. In this case the harvesting time is the end of the world; the harvesters are the angels gathering men for the last judgment; the seed represents the graces of Redemption; the crop consists of those who will go to Heaven. In other cases, as here, the harvesting time begins with the preaching of the Gospel by Christ and ends with the last day of the present world; the harvesters are Christ and those who work with and after Him for the salvation of souls; the seed which produces the crop consists of the light of reason, the yearning of the human heart for God, and the supernatural revelations given before the coming of the Savior, in

short, of all the preparations made by God for the reception of the Christian revelation; the harvesters are all who work for the spread of the Gospel; the crop is the whole of mankind; the reaping consists in gathering as many as possible into the Kingdom of Christ.

This was the crop and such was the work to which the Savior now invited His disciples. So far they had been good listeners and had suffered themselves to be brought into the Kingdom of God, drawing great personal profit from their companionship with Jesus; but they had not yet tried to make the winning of others their avowed task. The first section of the world-wide field on which the reapers were to work, was Palestine, where for centuries the Divine Sower, Yahweh Himself, had cultivated the crop with singular care. But unhappily the Divine Harvester, who ought to have been assisted in His labor by the religious authorities of Israel, so far had practically been left alone. One or the other person in a few isolated cases had lent a little help by winning here and there a soul for Christ. But the bulk of the people still remained undecided between Jesus and the Pharisees, and the leaders bent every effort to keep the masses away from Him. Yes, "the laborers were few," while "the harvest," the number of Israelites to be won for the Gospel, "was great." It almost seems as though the Lord, seeing that He personally could not win the multitudes, wished to try a new exedient by sending simple Galilean fishermen, people of their own class, to speak to them.

Applications. 1) We hear a general complaint about the dearth of vocations, particularly among the girls. But even the number of priests and male religious in this country has not kept pace with the increase of our Catholic population and the new needs which have arisen. The work of the Church at no time in her history has been so varied and extensive as it must be now. With the trend of modern civilization entirely new religious, moral, and social needs have arisen, which the Church must meet if she is to do her work properly. If today she would confine herself only to those kinds of work which were demanded fifty years ago, she would lose many souls.

We must, therefore, give our earnest attention to fostering and developing vocations, first of all by doing what may be called group-work. It consists chiefly in directing the thoughts and ideals of the young to higher things by means of instructions and proper remarks timely placed. Let us not undervalue the importance of the latter; they are more efficacious at times than sermons. Secondly, we must do individual work by influencing in a prudent manner those who bid fair to become good priests and good religious. But in doing so let us always insist on their choosing a regular confessor and taking the matter up with him; he must be, as a rule, the one who gives the final decision.

2) The words of Christ cited at the head of this section have come to be quoted almost exclusively about

nations and persons who give fair promise of embracing the true faith. And yet, the Savior uttered them with reference to the Jews, who never held out any great hope of accepting His doctrine. But the Jews had the first right to the work of the Apostles, since God had chosen them as His people. This teaches us not to despise apostolic work among people who do not offer good prospects, but always to give the first place to those who have the first right to our ministrations, even if only scanty fruit can be expected. As Christ worked and canvassed for laborers who would devote their toil to the unpromising Israelites, so we must not despise the efforts which are made to convert Protestants, schismatics, and nations who do not respond readily to missionary zeal.

III. THE LORD OF THE HARVEST. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest."

A. NECESSITY OF PRAYER. Christ wanted to make His disciples realize that nobody can undertake the work of saving souls and spreading the Gospel on his own authority. As nobody is permitted to put the sickle to another man's crop and bind the sheaves, even though a precious harvest would be lost for the lack of the sickle, but one must be authorized for this work by the owner, so every apostolic worker must be authorized by God or by the authority instituted by Him.

Moreover, Jesus intended to teach the disciples, and through them the entire world, that God, for weighty

reasons, desires us to pray for vocations, just as He wants to be asked to grant us our daily bread. To mention only two of these reasons: He wants us to understand that a vocation consists of a long series of special graces; He wants the recipient of those graces to cooperate faithfully with them, ever mindful of the debt of gratitude he owes God; He wants parents and educators to be exhorted to train the young so that they are fit to be called; He wants everybody to be warned not to put obstacles in the way of a vocation, but to consider it a privilege to have a child, a relative, a pupil who has been chosen for this great work.

Secondly, Christ by this command exhorts all, the prospective candidate as well as others, to bear in mind that nobody should dare to apply, or persuade another to apply, for admission to the priesthood and to the religious state unless he or she is called by God and has the necessary qualifications. Nothing is more detrimental to the Church than priests and religious who have embraced their state from worldly motives. And yet, in all ages people will be tempted "to take the honor," or persuade others to assume it, without "being called by God, as Aaron was" (Hebr. 5,4). When we pray for religious and sacerdotal vocations, we ask God to open the treasures of His special gifts, without which nobody can be a useful reaper in the field of souls.

Application. A brief reflection will show how many different graces God must give, not only once, but for

a whole life-time, to those who, according to His intention, are to embrace the sacerdotal or the religious state. It is a special gift of God that a person possesses the qualities of mind and heart which are required for these states, that he is led in youth on that road which terminates in the sanctuary or the cloister, spends the years of schooling in a proper and profitable manner, is protected from dangerous temptations, has parents and teachers who give him the proper training, and, finally, that his career is not thwarted by ill chance. We hear many complaints about the inefficiency of our modern schools and homes in training the young; but how few pray for the graces which parents and teachers need to perform their task properly!

B. LABORERS IN THE HARVEST. We ought to notice also that the Lord bids His disciples pray for laborers, that is to say, for hard-working men, who are not afraid of the heat and the toil, but, without sparing themselves, assiduously use their brain and their brawn. The time for harvesting is the shortest period of the year and in this work, more than in most other occupations, one must make prompt use of fair weather, since one never knows when rain will interfere, which prevents the garnering and spoils the crops.

Application. Our motto then may be expressed in the strong words which, according to the Greek text, St. Paul uses in addressing the Corinthians: "I most cheerfully shall spend my all and let all there is in me be fully used up for your souls" (2 Cor. 12,15). We should never

ask: "What is the minimum of strict duty?" and rest satisfied with doing no more, but: "What is the maximum that I can do?" and like faithful harvesters, who closely watch the indications of the weather and the condition of the crops, secure the greatest possible return for "the Lord of the harvest."

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for our vocation; generous oblation for work in God's harvest; petition for holy zeal; prayer for parents and educators. "Lo, here I am, send me" (Is. 6,8).

Meditation 2

THE NEW LABORERS

(Matt. 10,1–5[a])

"And having called his twelve disciples together, he gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of diseases, and all manner of infirmities. And the names of the twelve Apostles are these: The first, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; and James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. These Jesus sent: commanding them." (Greek text: "These Jesus sent after giving them His directions.")

In these words the Evangelist describes the foundation of the apostolic body or, as the language of the school has it, of "the Apostolic College," which continues to exist in the Catholic hierarchy of the Pope and the bishops. Its mission and powers for the time being were restricted in more than one way, and extraordinary in other respects, in accordance with the personal mission of the Savior. An observant reader will notice how St. Matthew emphasizes the care with which Christ made His selection, and the benefit bestowed on Israel by this act. Nor must we overlook the fact that both St. Matthew and St. Luke enumerate the Apostles in pairs.

Let us entreat the grace to be faithful workers in our apostolic vocation.

I. A SPECIAL MISSION. "And having called his twelve disciples together, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of diseases, and all manner of infirmities."

A. THE POWERS CONFERRED. We translate from the Greek text: "And having called His well-known twelve disciples, He gave them power over unclean spirits so that they could expel them, and could heal every illness and every weakness." The Evangelist first of all mentions some of the powers Christ conferred on the Twelve. It seems that he wishes to emphasize the dignity to which Jesus elevated "His twelve well-known disciples," whom the readers of his gospel have seen as His constant companions. Very significant, moreover, are

the powers which St. Matthew enumerates: "He gave them control over evil spirits." All the Twelve were to do until the coming of the Holy Ghost on the first Christian Pentecost, was to convert the Israelites to a willing acceptance of Christ as their Messias; for the only message they were to preach until then is summed up by Jesus in these words: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10,7). In order to effect an entrance for this Kingdom, the power of the opposing kingdom had to be broken. Therefore, Christ "gave them control over evil spirits." This control embraced two powers, to expel the demons and to cure "every disease and every infirmity."

Commentators warn us against restricting the former to delivering demoniacs. Holy Church to this very day uses a form of exorcism in every solemn baptism, even of infants. She does not suppose that every baptized person is an energumen, nor does she perform this ceremony merely as a matter of precaution in case the catechumen should be possessed; but she wants to break the influence which the suggestions of the devil can exercise on every man, by causing temptations and filling him through the agency of wicked people with all sorts of notions and aspirations contrary to the spirit of a true Christian. The Apostles certainly needed a power of this kind to win the misguided Israelites and their leaders for the Gospel.

The power "to heal every illness and every weakness" or bodily infirmity, according to the Evangelist, was a function of the control which the Apostles were now

given over demons. To understand this, we should bear in mind that quite a number of the prayers by which certain sacramentals are blessed contain a petition for protection against the infestations of the devil, as well as for deliverance from bodily infirmities, for instance, the blessing of medals of St. Benedict and of St. Ignatius water. According to the Sacred Scriptures diseases at times are caused by the evil spirits. Moreover, since man lost his immunity from bodily illness through original sin, even a disease caused directly by natural agents, in its ultimate source is an effect produced by the demon. Finally, miraculous cures by their very nature draw man to God and thus are apt to counteract the influence of the devil.

Application. Our first care in the apostolic work of the twentieth century, like that of Christ, must be to withdraw men from the influence of the devil. While demoniacal possession, at least in Christian countries, is rather infrequent today, Satan's control is just as efficacious as it was in Christ's time, though assuming more of an intellectual and moral nature. Lucifer rules chiefly by creating a domineering public opinion, general views and tendencies which are anti-Christian. Our endeavor must be to ground ourselves deeply in the Christian view of life and try to spread it among people. For this it is necessary to lead an interior life and, above all, to make good meditations.

B. THE PERSONS CHOSEN. Twelve plain men of the people, mostly fishermen, one an ex-publican, and one

the future traitor, were made sharers in the works of Omnipotence. Our Lord entertained no fear that this step might detract from His own importance or that these simple men might abuse their power. Nor did He harbor any jealousy or show Himself narrow-minded, thinking that they might become proud and self-conceited. His only thought was the salvation of Israel; for Him it was immaterial who did the work or who received the credit. When souls were to be saved or helped, nothing was too great or precious for Him.

Applications. 1) Let us beware of clerical envy and jealousy. Not all the good must be done by us alone. Even in the case of souls particularly entrusted to our care, we should rejoice when they are helped by others, and never through jealousy prevent anybody from doing good.

2) Christ conferred these great powers in His own name; "*He* gave them power," says the Evangelist. In this He again showed His divinity.

II. THE CHOICE OF THE TWELVE. "And the names of the twelve Apostles are these: The first, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; and James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him."

A. THEIR ANTECEDENTS. St. Matthew, as on other occasions, so here succinctly narrates events which according to the other evangelists happened at different

times, but belong together by a logical connection. The choice of the Twelve in reality occurred before the Sermon on the Mount, but they were sent out on their first mission only after the Pharisees accused Christ of working His miracles with the help of Beelzebub (see Vol. II, page 339). We find a touching proof of the Evangelist's modesty in the fact that while the other evangelists put his name before that of his companion, and avoid every reference to his former occupation, he places the name of the companion with whom he was sent out, first and emphasizes his having been a publican. It is also significant that not only is Peter placed first in all the lists of the Apostles found in the New Testament, but both Matthew and Luke stress his peculiar position by saying that he was the first.

Peter and Andrew, James "the Greater" and John, as well as Philip were from Bethsaida, a suburb of Capharnaum; Nathanael or Bartholomew, as he is now called, came from Cana; Matthew from Capharnaum. Of James "the Lesser," the son of Alpheus, and his brother Jude or Thaddeus, we only know that they were Galileans. So were all the rest, except perhaps Judas Iscariot. If, as is probable, "Iscariot" means "the man of Carioth," the traitor was the only Judean among them. Many commentators say with good reason that John and his brother James the Greater were cousins of Christ; some also hold that the two sons of Alpheus or Cleophas, Jude or Thaddeus and James the Lesser, the first bishop of Jerusalem, were blood-relations of the Savior.

Considering the task of the Apostles, we must say that the number of those chosen was very generous; for Galilee, the territory in which they were to work, comprised only about fifty miles from North to South, and less from East to West, and the work imposed on them consisted only in persuading the people to do penance, come to Christ and see whether He was not the Messias.

Considering the selection which the Savior made, we must confess that it strikingly manifests His humility, kindness, and prudence. In view of the antipathy existing between Judeans and Galileans, He chose almost exclusively men who, on account of their extraction and habitation, were not objectionable to the people whom they were to address. And since the horrible calumny of the Pharisees rendered Jesus personally suspicious to the simple folk, He sent them men who were well known to them and, being His constant companions, could give them detailed and reliable information about His character and mode of life.

Application. Let us love and trust the Savior, who also in dealing with us often enough manifests a similar humility, kindness, and wisdom. And like Him let us learn to make concessions to the prejudices of those for whom we labor, provided this can be done without violating a principle. Is not the Holy See by its efforts to establish a native hierarchy in the foreign missions acting like Christ?

B. IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS the Apostles differed widely. St. Peter was a man of deep faith, generous, loyal, enthusiastic, and quick of perception, a born leader, though somewhat impetuous. A distinguishing trait of James the Greater is expressed in the title which the Savior gave to him and to his brother John: "Boanerges, sons of thunder" (Mark 3,17). Of an ardent nature he and his brother wanted to call fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9,15); after the first Pentecost his burning zeal in preaching the Gospel rendered him particularly obnoxious to the Jews, and he became the first martyr of the Apostolic College, being slain by order of the younger Herod, to the great satisfaction of the Judeans.

His brother John combined a similar ardent nature with a peculiar sense of tact and modesty, great natural affection, pensiveness and contemplativeness; though the youngest of the Apostles, he seems to have possessed the keenest mind among the Twelve. Of Jude (or Thaddeus) nothing is mentioned in the gospels except his election; but in the canonical epistle bearing his name he shows himself an energetic, outspoken man, who "hits straight from the shoulder" and is averse to ceremonies. Philip appears as an obedient, but somewhat timid nature. Thomas is generous, but excitable and headstrong. Nathanael (or Bartholomew) is a candid soul, more educated than the rest, independent in forming his own opinions, a man who wants to have things proved, but is open to conviction.

James the Lesser, the first bishop of Jerusalem and brother to Jude, manifests qualities like his brother; though attached to the Law of Moses, he nevertheless defends the freedom of the Gentile Christians at the Council of the Apostles and seems to have enjoyed a distinguished place in the opinions of the first Christians. Andrew, the senior of the Apostolic College, brings his younger brother Peter to Christ and is requested by Philip to introduce the Gentiles who wish to meet the Savior after His solemn entry into Jerusalem. He is the first to follow Christ and in his company John seems to take courage to do likewise. The surnames "the Cananean" and "Zelotes" given to Simon would seem to indicate that he had belonged to the party of zealots who wished to establish the Kingdom of the Messias by force of arms.

Application. The Savior is willing to make use of various types of character, provided they will let Him train and direct them, and provided they serve Him with a pure intention. This is all He requires, but on this He must insist. This He demands of us too, not only during the years of the seminary and the novitiate, but all through life. Do we always show this spirit?

C. THEIR COMMON FEATURES. Though different in character, the Apostles were one in their faith and devotion to Christ, in the strict obedience and loving abandon with which they suffered themselves to be trained, corrected, and even rebuked by the Master, and endured

every hardship and privation in order to be near Him and serve Him.

A second trait which they had in common was their fearlessness. We must not judge them by their conduct on the night of Christ's passion. We shall see, as we read further, that a number of circumstances that night and the following day combined to upset them and fill them with confusion and terror. It required great courage to acknowledge and follow the Lord at all times, as the Apostles did; for He and they were almost from the very beginning the victims of chicanery and persecution. This persecution was one of the reasons why the majority of the people never were really loyal to Jesus. The Apostles plainly saw that they were serving a man who was very unpopular and a cause which was doomed to failure in Israel. Nevertheless they did not leave the Master, rather their loyalty grew apace with the persecution. Only the avaricious Judean of Carioth turned traitor already a year before he delivered his Master into the hands of His enemies. The extreme caution and the hypocrisy with which he acted in the garden of Olives, shows that he was convinced not only of the loyalty of the Eleven, but of their fearlessness. Even when the Eleven saw the Master retreating step by step before the attacks of the combined Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, and finally seeking concealment in the mountains of Ephrem, they had no thought of leaving Him. And when Christ announced His intention of returning into Judea, though some objected for a moment, fearing for the safety of the

beloved Master, they all made St. Thomas' sentiment their own: "Let us also go and die with him" (John 11,16).

Thus we come to their third common trait, their absolute, total, and generous surrender to Christ, at first because they saw in Him God's messenger, later on because they believed in His divinity. St. Peter's confession in the synagogue of Capharnaum expresses this whole-souled devotion: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known, that thou art the Christ, the Son of God" (John 6,69f.).

Application. Here then we have the three qualities in which we must imitate the Apostles—firm practical faith in Christ, which shows itself in obedience and pliability when He trains, directs, corrects, rebukes us either through those who take His place, or by means of inward inspirations and the vicissitudes of life; fearlessness, which makes us loyal to Him in spite of all difficulties; whole-souled surrender of ourselves and all our interests, desires, and plans to Him, so that He may tell us what He told the Apostles at the Last Supper: "You are they who continued with me in my temptations: And I dispose to you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom; that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom" (Luke 22,28–30).

D. SENT IN PAIRS. St. Luke, like St. Matthew, enumerates the Apostles in pairs, with this one difference

that, instead of Jude, Simon the Cananean is mentioned as the companion of James the Less, and Judas Iscariot is associated with Thaddeus instead of Simon the Cananean. The difference in the account of the first and third gospel finds a ready explanation in the words of the second: "He called the twelve and *began* to send them two and two" (Mark 6,7). We must, therefore, assume that Christ repeatedly sent them out two and two, but not necessarily always with the same companion. The first and probably chief purpose for sending them out in twos was to give their words the necessary authority with the people. The Jews, following the direction of Deuteronomy (19,15), considered an official testimony valid only when given at least by two persons. The message the Apostles had to deliver, though short, was most important and, therefore, had to be announced with due formality. Other purposes were that they might help each other, comfort each other in difficulties and act as protection and a kind of control for each other. Experience proves that "the rule of the companion," wisely enacted in many religious communities, is a great safeguard for religious decorum and prevents many an imprudent act as well as temptations occasioned by irresponsible or malicious persons.

Application. If we belong to a religious community which has this rule, let us not make light of it; God's blessing and Christ's protection go with it. If we are not subject to such a regulation, we must nevertheless be prudent enough to seek a companion to serve as wit-

ness when it is advisable. At times even a priest, when on an errand of His sacred ministry, needs a companion. We must have due regard for our good name and not forget that there are very malicious and suspicious people.

III. THE MISSION. "These Jesus sent after giving them His order." By this "order" we must understand two things, a formal, authoritative commission and a set of directions about the manner in which they were to carry out their charge. Here we consider only the authoritative commission. As He had formed them into a corporate body distinct from the people, from His other adherents, and from the body of the seventy-two disciples, whom He was to choose later on, so they now entered upon a real office, which was to be theirs until they died, and which was to be continued in their successors until the end of time. They now became the official, divinely appointed witnesses of the Savior, and they had an indisputable right to claim a hearing from everybody, so much so that, according to Christ's words, Sodom and Gomorrha on the day of judgment will be treated with greater leniency than those who refused to hear and accept the words of the Apostles (10,15). The Apostles and their successors from this day on were "ambassadors of Christ" in all due form. It is true that for the present their powers and functions were not yet as complete as they were going to be after His Ascension; but the message they had to announce on

these their first expeditions was a message from Christ, and the miracles they performed were free gifts of the Savior.

Application. What must have been the sentiments of the Apostles when they received this, their first, "obedience." They realized that they were being sent by a representative of God, if indeed they did not yet fully grasp the divine dignity of their Master, and that they were invested with wonderful powers. They entered upon their task with gratitude for the dignity conferred on them; they went out full of confidence; they sought nothing but the glory of God and the salvation of the people, whose spiritual misery the Savior had described to them in such touching terms. Let us accept the appointments of our Superiors in the same spirit, look beyond the natural aspect those appointments may present, and view them as coming from the Savior, in whom we behold not merely a messenger from Heaven, but God Incarnate, and let us always be anxious to do His will.

COLLOQUY. Offer up thanks to Christ for your vocation; protest your readiness for generous service; entreat His grace to become a better apostle; promise to follow His example and tread in the footsteps of the first Apostles. "That I may consummate my course and the ministry of the word which I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 22,24).

Meditation 3

APOSTOLIC DIRECTIONS

(Matt. 10,5^{b}–8^{a})

"Go ye not into the way of the Gentiles, and into the city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go ye rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And going, preach, saying: The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils."

In these words Christ, for good reasons, restricts the activity of the Apostles on their first expeditions to work among the Israelites. He points out the principal object to be attained by the present expedition, namely, to inform the people of the advent of the promised Kingdom of God. Finally, He commands His ambassadors to make extensive use of all the supernatural means He placed at their disposal for proving their words and persuading their hearers to follow the Messias.

Let us ask for the grace that in our apostolic work we may always have a careful regard for the rights, susceptibilities, and prejudices of those whom we must try to win for Christ, and that our only motive may be the properly understood interests of His sacred cause and the welfare of erring souls.

I. THE TERRITORY LIMITED. We quote the Greek text: "Do not leave the direct route to go into the way

leading to the territory of the Gentiles, and do not enter into a Samaritan city; on the contrary, you must go to the lost sheep of the Israelitic nation." Why this limitation? It was dictated chiefly by the Savior's regard for the rights and susceptibilities of Israel. Christ throughout His whole life was most exact in respecting the rights and privileges of others; only on very rare occasions and for the weightiest reasons did He avail Himself of His own higher authority. Now the Israelites had the first right to the Messias and His Kingdom by virtue of the divine promises, which remained in force until He was definitely rejected by the Jews, when the priests proclaimed: "We have no king but Caesar," and the people cried out: "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

Moreover, the Israelites were jealous, over-sensitive, and unfair in their prejudices against the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Had Christ permitted His Apostles to propagate the Kingdom of God among the Samaritans and Gentiles, the Jews would have had a very specious pretext for rejecting Him, and this all the more since the efforts of the Apostles would have been very successful, as the events after Pentecost showed.

Therefore, whilst blaming the Jews for their self-conceit when the proper occasion for doing so presented itself, He took them as they were, without approving their arrogance and pride. In all this He was not guided by cold calculation, but by a noble respect for their rights and by a gentle commiseration, which He briefly, but most eloquently expressed by calling them "the lost

sheep of the house of Israel." Indeed, not merely a few individuals, but the entire nation could in full truth be called "lost sheep."

Application. These few words throw a wonderful light on our Lord's character, which must fill us with love and confidence; for He has a touching regard for stubbornly blind and conceited sinners, since even to them He allows a claim to His consideration. But they should also teach us a great lesson for our work. As the Apostles, so all who share in their labors, are sent first to the lost sheep, and they must take these blind, headstrong, conceited persons as they are, not as they ought to be. Whilst not approving their prejudices and errors, they should avoid useless provocations, take into consideration the faults and frailties of those people, and act accordingly. At times it may even become expedient to withdraw or ask others to take in hand those entrusted to our special care, thus following the example of the Master, who sent His Apostles to the Israelites, the people most especially entrusted to His care by the Father, when they had become prejudiced against Him. This is Christian unselfishness.

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE APOSTOLIC MESSAGE. "Going preach, saying: The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was a rather brief message the Apostles were to deliver. It practically amounted only to a proof that the time foretold by the prophets for the coming of the Messias was at hand and possibly to a brief explanation

of the fact that the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. In reality their message was the same as that of the Baptist; but the form in which it was to be delivered, was very different. They were to announce the glad tidings without adding threats of the coming judgment. They were to prove to the people that the desire and hope of centuries, the object of numerous prayers, the inspiration of so many just men—patriarchs, prophets, and kings—was not only to be seen, but to be accepted and enjoyed by them. The sermon of the Kingdom certainly could not be preached to the Jews in a more winning manner.

Application. Is not the human heart rendered more accessible by tidings of joy and love? The elevating language used by Christ and His first Apostles was proper not only for the Jews. We may distinguish two classes among the really zealous apostles of all times, those who try to frighten men into a minimum of service by constantly and exclusively harping on the punishments awaiting sinners, and those who lovingly and gently lead men to a whole-hearted service by drawing their first and chief motives from the elevating truths of our holy religion. Apostles of the latter class by no means avoid all reference to God's justice, nor are they afraid to threaten when threats are necessary; but they stress God's goodness and mercy and the love of the Savior of the world, and thus achieve better results. For the fundamental tendency of the human heart is love of good and desire of happiness, not hatred of evil

and fear of misery. Our heart is made for God, the infinite source of all good and all happiness. Therefore, it cannot be impressed more deeply and captivated more lastingly than by this inborn yearning for God. Hence, he who knows best how to make use of this motive, will most readily lead souls to God and keep them near Him.

III. USE OF THE APOSTOLIC POWERS. "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils." Under Yahweh's own direction Israel had learned that miracles and prophecies were the credentials of those who spoke in His name. Therefore, in order that the Apostles might be able to prove to the people their right to preach in the name of Yahweh and win them for the message they had to announce, Christ gave them the power to work miracles. On the one hand He restricted this power by confining it to miracles which gave relief in suffering, on the other hand He made it as wide as possible by extending it to miracles of the highest order, namely, raising the dead, which is a participation in one of God's highest prerogatives. Divine graces now were really showered on Israel in order that it might accept the one great grace of Redemption and faith in Christ. We have here another instance illustrating the truth that nothing is too precious for Christ when there is question of saving souls.

Applications. 1.) Until after Christ's Resurrection the Apostles could only work miracles which directly

benefited the body, not any of the wondrous deeds which are performed in the Sacraments of the New Law, except that possibly they could confer Christian baptism. Theologians are not agreed whether the baptism which the Apostles administered by Christ's order during His earthly life, was the sacrament of the New Law or merely a penitential ceremony. The apostles of our time receive the power to free souls from diseases and raise the spiritually dead to life, which certainly in itself is a greater and more beneficial work than the power of performing miracles for the benefit of the body. But while the spiritual benefits which we confer as priests are most precious, they make no impression on the senses and, therefore, must be re-enforced by a miracle of the moral order, which wins the good will of the people—Christian charity.

2) Seeing the generosity of Christ in endowing the Apostles with such great powers for the benefit of souls, we must be filled with a holy confidence in going about our tasks. Considering merely the demands we must make of men in requiring them to accept the faith of Christ and live up to its doctrines, we must bear in mind that of ourselves we are powerless to accomplish anything, but, sparing no effort, we must put our entire trust in the generosity of God. His liberality must be a constant stimulus for us to do everything in our power to lead souls to Heaven.

COLLOQUY. Gratitude for our apostolic vocation; generous offer to do all the work and make all the sacri-

fices it entails; petition for the spirit of self-immolation. "I have become all things to all men, that I might save all" (1 Cor. 9,22).

Meditation 4

FURTHER DIRECTIONS

(Matt. 18,8b–11)

"Freely have you received, freely give. Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses: nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor staff; for the workman is worthy of his meat. And in whatsoever city or town you shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and there abide till you go thence."

Our Lord now gave His Apostles rules for their personal conduct. They were not to work for temporal gain; they were to travel in apostolic poverty, depend on God for their sustenance, choose their host prudently, and not to change their lodging.

Let us ask for the grace that we may always conduct ourselves in perfect accord with the spirit expressed in the regulations which Christ gave to His Apostles.

1. GRATUITOUS WORK. "Freely have you received, freely give." Long experience has illustrated the wisdom of this regulation; for simony in all its forms has

always proved most harmful to Christ's cause. The Apostles, moreover, were to be living exemplifications of the spirit of the eight beatitudes and, therefore, had to be particularly exact in observing poverty in Spirit, which for all times is the first requirement for membership in Christ's Kingdom. Again, the graces which they were to offer to men had no equivalent which could be expressed in monetary values. Furthermore, in all the Sacred Scriptures there is no record of Christ ever having expressed a wish for an alms in return for the spiritual blessings and corporal cures He granted the people. He bestowed all not only freely, but gratuitously. And as the Apostles had received the graces of the apostolate gratuitously, He had all the greater right to demand that they imitate His example most conscientiously. He had to insist on it all the more, because one great trouble of Israel was its insatiable craving for the wealth of the earth and the expectation that the Messias would bring them not only world-dominion, but the riches of the nations. Consequently we find that the Apostles after Christ's Resurrection were almost scrupulous and harsh in their observance of this demand of the Master. Peter showed himself very stern in dealing with Simon the Magician (Acts 8,18ff.), and Paul even refused to avail himself of the right given them by the Lord to demand their sustenance from those for whom they labored, but preferred to support himself and his companions by his personal labor, plying his trade as a tent-maker besides fulfilling the arduous duties of the apostolate.

Applications. 1) Let us carefully avoid every semblance of a desire for earthly goods, whether money or gifts, in return for our services—fully convinced that this is the spirit by which God wants to see us animated, and a necessary condition for really successful work. We ought to be glad when we can do something gratuitously.

2) The reason which the Savior gives for His injunction to the Apostles demands our special attention: "Freely have you received." The grace of our vocation is a gratuitous gift of God, which we could not merit, and which He denied to the majority of those with whom we were brought up. Not even one in several hundreds of Catholics is a priest, and certainly not one in a hundred men and women is a religious. The training which we received in the seminary or the novitiate was given gratuitously, and the sacrament of ordination and the religious profession are also free gifts of the Church and of God. Let us not only be glad if we can make a small return to God and the Church by rendering our services gratuitously, but let us be generous in making the most ample use of our gifts for the benefit of others.

II. THE CLAIM TO SUPPORT. A. APOSTOLIC POVERTY.

We give the words of Christ according to the Greek text: "Provide yourselves for your journey neither with gold nor silver nor small change of money for your belt [in which the Orientals used to carry their

money]; nor with a scrip [for carrying provisions], nor with two under-garments, nor two pairs of sandals nor with a staff." (Many manuscripts have: "with two staffs.") We must say a few words about a small discrepancy beween the first and the second gospel. St. Luke's account is substantially the same as that of St. Matthew; but St. Mark says: "He commanded them not to take anything along on their journey except only a staff." While, according to St. Mark, Christ permitted the Apostles "to take along . . . only a staff," according to the other two evangelists He forbade them "to provide themselves with a staff." Some interpreters attempt to solve this discrepancy by insisting that Christ forbade the Apostles to *provide themselves* with a staff, but did not forbid them to take one along if they possessed one; others call attention to the fact that, as in all writings of antiquity, pagan as well as Christian, so also in Sacred Scripture the words of a speaker, though given in the form of a direct address, frequently are quoted only according to their meaning and are not given in the form of an exact literal repetition.

Now, there can be no doubt about the idea Christ wished to convey. As the Apostles, according to the preceding direction, were not to seek monetary gain in return for their work, so too they were not to make extensive preparations for their bodily comfort. He did not want them to take any money along, neither a large sum, represented by gold and silver, nor even small change consisting of brass coins. They were to set out just as they were, omitting to provide even for the or-

dinary necessities of a traveler, a scrip, a pouch or a knapsack with a few provisions, a change of underwear and sandals, traveling-boots or other little conveniences represented by a staff. As we learn from St. Luke (8,1ff.), at the time the Apostles were sent out on their first expedition, the temporal needs of Christ and His entourage were looked after by Magdalen and "many women who ministered unto Him of their substance"; and it would seem that He and His companions as a rule returned to Capharnaum for the Sabbath. So the Savior went around in Galilee without baggage and traveling accoutrement. He saw to it that He and His Apostles always practiced the greatest simplicity, professing a total unconcern about their bodily wants. This "apostolic poverty and simplicity," necessary in some form or other at all times, was all the more required for work among the Jews, in order to rid them of the notion that the Messianic Kingdom was to bring them the greatest measure of creature comfort.

Application. Modesty and simplicity in our mode of living is very necessary in this day of fabulous wealth and ill-gotten gain, when the entire world is engaged in the mad pursuit of comfort and pleasure. People are of the opinion that we, being spiritual persons, are totally immune from worldly things. While some will not be scandalized if they discover that they were mistaken in this opinion, the good people will be troubled about it and, not daring to criticize, will pity us; others will despise us as hypocrites.

B. TRUST IN PROVIDENCE. We quote the Greek text: "The laborer deserves his sustenance." With these words Christ concluded His directions concerning the poverty His Apostles were to practice on their expeditions. The idea He wished to convey to them, was that, as God had sent them to work for Him, He would assume the care for their material support. Consequently, He would not let them starve, but provide them with the necessities of life. Therefore, Christ's axiom, "the laborer is worth his hire," does not directly charge the people to whom the Apostles ministered with the duty of supporting them. In the entire context their work is conceived as a labor undertaken for God; it is a labor in God's harvest by men hired by Yahweh. Indirectly, however, He implied the obligation on the part of the people to support the evangelical laborers and, therefore, the appeal repeatedly made by St. Paul was a just one. (See 1 Cor. 9,7–14; Gal. 6,6; Rom. 15,27.) The Savior's chief intention here and now was to point out to His Apostles that they had a better guarantee for being provided with their daily sustenance than the duty imposed on unreliable human beings, namely, the merciful love and care of God, who will never defraud His laborers of their just hire.

Application. Let us not be troubled by cares for our daily bread; but realizing the claim we have on God in this matter, let us faithfully discharge our duties, conscientiously observe the rules and regulations laid down for our work, and, above all, sanctify ourselves.

Only a faithful laborer has a claim to support from his master. We must never be deceived by the specious plea that our temporal needs dispense us from the exact discharge of all our duties.

III. CARE FOR THE GOSPEL. "And in whatsoever city or town you shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and there abide till you go thence." Whilst forced to neglect all temporal interests the Apostles were directed by Christ to give every consideration to the cause they represented, even down to the choice of the host in whose house they would stay. For the personality and character of that host could materially influence the reception of their message, either favorably or unfavorably. Therefore, they were told to choose their host, not at random nor with a view to their own profit or comfort; but coming to a place they were to make inquiries about a worthy man with whom they might stay during their sojourn in that city or village. The worthiness of the host alone was to decide. And once they had accepted his hospitality, neither the regard for their own personal convenience nor the desire of others was to induce them to seek other lodgings or take their meals elsewhere. Nor were they to waste their time on mere social calls and conversations. They should have thought for nothing else but their apostolic duties.

Application. If we wish to act according to the spirit which Christ wished to foster by this direction, we must proceed in a tactful manner, with prudence and

forethought at all times, possessing that "pastoral circumspection" so necessary to a true lover of souls. Christ did not send the Apostles on expeditions in order that they might be free for a while from the exactions and discipline which a life of perfection in close companionship with Him demanded; but He sent them out in order that they might do good and win souls for the Kingdom of God. We, too, in our intercourse with seculars, must seek only to promote the glory of God and to benefit souls. While for a diocesan priest it may at times be commendable to seek moderate and proper recreation in the company of lay people, it is hardly ever beneficial for a religious. The specious argument that a religious by this means can further the interests of his community or his institute, ought not to deceive us. If he is honest, he will probably have to confess that his real motive is a desire to escape religious discipline for a while and indulge in secular diversions. God's blessing can hardly be expected in matters which militate against the religious spirit.

IV. OBLIGATION OF THE REGULATIONS. The commentators here propose the question whether these regulations of Christ were mere suggestions or real precepts; and if the latter, whether they bound the Apostles all the time or only on this expedition. They answer that the words of the Savior contained real precepts for the time being, and the entire context of our pericope goes to prove this. But, they add that these rules were to be carried out literally only until the com-

ing of the Holy Ghost, while their spirit and scope remain obligatory for all times for all those who engage in apostolic work. This becomes evident when we compare the circumstances of the expeditions in Galilee during Christ's life-time with those under which the Gospel had to be preached later on. Their first work took the Apostles among their own co-religionists and countrymen, who were accustomed to offering hospitality and material support to traveling Rabbis. The Galileans worshipped the same God and expected the Messianic Kingdom; they knew Christ and His miracles. The Apostles were not to inform them as yet of the entire contents of Christ's teaching, but they were only to convince them that Christ was the promised Messias. After the coming of the Holy Ghost, however, they had to work, not only among their fellow-countrymen, but among pagans and foreigners, who worshipped idols, hated the Jews, and had to make great personal sacrifices in order to adopt the strict code of Christian morality. To ask these people to lodge, feed, and furnish the Apostles with all their material necessities would have been ruinous to the great cause and have doomed the Christian messengers to starvation and death.

But the *spirit* which dictated these regulations is necessary at all times. It inculcates contempt of earthly things, freedom from avarice, and implicit trust in a merciful and loving God. We see, therefore, that the Apostles at the very beginning of their work among the Gentiles used other means to secure the necessities

of life, making as little demand on the people as possible.

Application. We notice here again how averse Christ is to a stiff and mechanical interpretation of the rules of asceticism, or, as the Apostle of the Gentiles calls it, to "the letter that killeth," but wishes "the spirit which quickeneth" to prevail in moral matters. He demands a holy broad-mindedness, which energizes itself in the work of our vocation and in ascetical practices, not for the purpose of satisfying the aspirations of nature, but for the noble end of rendering us entirely free from ascetical conceit and wholly devoted to the interests of God.

COLLOQUY. Gratitude for the instruction Christ has given us in this meditation; generous resolution to be a true apostle; petition for the spirit of St. Paul, who says: "I will not be burdensome unto you. . . . But I gladly will spend and be spent [sold into slavery] for your souls" (2 Cor. 12,14.15).

Meditation 5

BLESSING AND CURSE

(Matt. 10,12–15)

"And when you come into the house, salute it, saying: Peace be to this house. And if that house be worthy, your peace shall come upon it; but if it be not worthy, your

peace shall return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words: going forth out of that house or city shake off the dust from your feet. Amen I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city."

In these words Christ gives His Apostles wise counsel concerning two points in which the average man experiences peculiar difficulties, namely, how to begin their message, and what to do if their words are spurned.

Let us ask for the grace to be true apostles of the peace of Christ and mediators of the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom.

I. THE SALUTATION. We quote the Greek text: "And entering any house, salute it. And if that house be worthy, your peace (blessing) shall come upon it." As mentioned before, the average man experiences a peculiar difficulty about the manner in which he is to begin work of this kind, how to introduce himself, and how to present his message. Christ, therefore, gave His Apostles excellent advice concerning these points. Commentators tell us that His words, "Coming into the house," refer not only to the house of the host with whom the Apostles would stay, but that the article in this expression has distributive meaning; for the Savior's direction in the following lines presupposes that the Apostles would not receive a glad welcome everywhere; but this cannot be supposed to occur in the house of "the worthy" person, the just and pious

man, whom they would first have to locate in the places to which they came. Christ's words, therefore, presuppose that the Savior was sending the Twelve on a house-to-house canvass.

He told His messengers to enter every house with a salutation which, though couched in the form customary among the Orientals, had a deep significance, and worked like a priestly blessing: "Peace be to this house." They were to wish to the inhabitants of every dwelling they approached "the peace of the Lord," peace with God, who now again wished to be a kind Father to them; peace with themselves, or the peace of their own souls, based on the consciousness of being God's children; peace with their fellow-men, and immunity from grief and trouble; that peace and freedom in which they could serve God according to the message the Savior was bringing. This salutation was not a mere wish, but a real blessing, coming from divine messengers and effecting what it expressed. "And if that house be worthy, your peace shall come upon it."

Let us not overlook the psychological effect this direction must have had on the Apostles. It made them realize that they came to the people as representatives of the Messias, the "Prince of Peace," and endowed with special powers. It took away all shyness which would be natural on such occasions; it gave them courage and roused their zeal. It rendered them circumspect, self-confident, dignified in the consciousness of their high responsibility. Add to this the special grace

and favor of God, and we cannot but admit that they were exceedingly well equipped for their task. Now they could enter upon it, not with a short-lived enthusiasm nor with an imprudent and tactless impetuosity, but with a deeply rooted conviction, wise circumspection, patient perseverance, and great conscientiousness.

Applications. 1) Like the Apostles we, too, in the pursuit of our vocation, go to the people fortified with powers from on high. For the priest the source of these powers is chiefly the sacrament of Holy Orders and the canonical mission; for the religious, his profession and his "obedience." These must be the fountains of our confidence and zeal. Let us not place our reliance in our intellectual and moral attainments, but proceed as though everything depended upon God and the graces of the vocation to which He has called us. Neither must we lack confidence; for are we not guided and inspired by divine wisdom and omnipotence?

2) As the first word of the Twelve was to be one of peace, kindness, and benevolence, so our conduct in dealing with men must be characterized by charity and good will towards all. Not only is the mouth of the apostle to say "Peace," but his whole bearing must breathe the peace of the Lord; all bitterness, all impetuosity, all imperious action must be foreign to him. His very exterior must announce peace wherever he goes. In virtue of Christ's command, every house he

enters has a right to his blessing and wish of peace. No matter how much he must interfere in the wrongdoings of the faithful, his last aim must always be the peace he has been chosen to bring.

II. FRUSTRATED BLESSING. "But if it be not worthy, your peace shall return to you." In these words Christ warned the Apostles of the unfavorable reception which they would meet at times. The Greek text here uses a construction which expresses a condition that is certain to occur according to the mind of the speaker. The words: "Your peace will return to you," must be explained according to the meaning which those words have in the Old Testament, with whose phraseology the Twelve were familiar. In Isaias (45,23) we read: "The word of justice shall go out of my mouth, and shall not return," which means in modern English: "I shall announce God's message, and it shall not remain inefficacious." Therefore, in our text the Savior assured the Apostles that if they pronounced a blessing of peace upon an unworthy house, God would see to it that it would remain inefficacious.

Christ's purpose in giving this direction was to bid the Twelve not to inquire whether the people were worthy of the apostolic blessing, but to presume that they deserved it, and to bestow it on every house they entered, excepting only such as were manifestly unworthy; because God would see to it that only worthy persons profited by it. This interpretation is generally admitted by the commentators.

But quite a number of commentators add a second explanation, namely, that, when the blessing could not profit the people to whom it was given, it would benefit the Apostles. But this interpretation would seem to be inadmissible; for it would necessitate the conclusion that, when the Apostles bestowed their blessing on worthy people, they deprived themselves of a benefit, and that for them it would be better to address unworthy persons than to have to deal with deserving ones. The truth of the matter is that by their blessing they performed an act of charity, no matter whether the people were worthy or not, and for this act they merited a reward, which was independent of the disposition of their listeners. They could profit by the repulse of the unworthy only if they bore it humbly and patiently, but in this case not the blessing, but their virtuous patience and humility secured for them a new profit. But if by the "return" of the blessing one understands that the blessing would be stored up, so to speak, and enhance its effect on some future worthy occasion, hardly any serious objection could be raised against this interpretation, except that no other text can be quoted in support of it.

Application. 1) Like the Apostles we, too, must be prepared for failures in our work. But they ought not to discourage us nor render us unnecessarily cautious. We should look upon the present failure as a guarantee of future success and as a means of guarding us against

pride, which so frequently assails a man when he is always successful.

2) We learn also that we must not be too cautious in making use of our sacerdotal powers for the good of the people, but give them the benefit of the doubt. "Sacramenta propter homines" is a principle which the Church has learned from the example of Christ.

III. FINAL REPULSE. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words: going forth out of that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Amen I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city." Another situation in which Christ's messenger may be at a loss how to act, occurs when people refuse absolutely to listen to him. The humiliation and contempt he is made to suffer, and the anxiety for their welfare, so seriously imperiled by their obstinacy, combine to throw him into a state of confusion and helplessness. A situation of this kind was all the more perplexing to the Apostles because they, like all Israelites, were passionately attached to their nation and, therefore, viewed with greatest concern the stubborn blindness of their fellow-countrymen, realizing, as they did, the serious consequences it entailed. Christ, therefore, told them clearly what to do in this case.

They were not only to leave such a house and such

a city, but to perform the ceremony of shaking the dust off their feet. This was for the Jews a very significant action. The Rabbinic precepts ordered them to shake the dust off their feet when they returned from a pagan district, which for them was levitically unclean, before they entered into Jewish territory. They had to perform the same ceremony before they mounted the steps leading to the Temple. The Apostles, therefore, declared by this action that the house or city and the inhabitants thereof were cut off from a participation in the blessings of the Messias, that God's punishments would overtake them, and that the messengers of Christ refused to have anything more to do with them, since they were, so to speak, afraid that the divine anger would strike them, too, if even a few particles of dust belonging to the doomed place stuck to them.

That Christ intended by this ceremony not only a severe rebuke, but also a threat of divine punishment, we see clearly from the words which He added: "Amen I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city." It is the Divine Judge who speaks thus. Sodom and Gomorrha certainly had sinned grievously and their fate on earth was most terrible. But they did not enjoy the revelations made to Israel from the days of the Patriarchs until the time of Christ and the Apostles; nor did they witness any of the great miracles which the Israelites saw. Hence their crimes were

not committed with the fullness of knowledge nor with the black ingratitude which characterized the obstinacy of Israel. They did not resist divine messengers sent to them personally. We see here how the sins of Christians will be punished with much greater severity than those of pagans, even if the excesses of the latter are in themselves greater than the sins of the former.

The effect these last words of the Savior had on the Twelve must have been overpowering; for the Israelites considered the crimes of Sodom and Gomorrha the greatest ever committed and their punishment most horrible. Christ's words aroused in them a holy zeal to do everything in their power to bring their beloved countrymen to their Messias, and filled them with a keen realization of the momentous import of their task and the sacredness of the high authority committed to them. But the words of Christ also served as a warning of the necessity no longer to identify themselves with their nation, but to sever every tie which bound them to Israel when Israel would definitely reject the Messias. They were slow to understand this necessity and needed a long preparation to familiarize themselves with it. We shall see in the sequel how Christ time and again reverted to it. Even many years later, when enjoying the full light of the Gospel, St. Paul, though constantly harassed by the Israelites, had to confess that the rejection of his nation caused him "continual sadness and great sorrow in his heart" (Rom. 9,1).

Applications. 1) The words of Christ teach us when we must be stern and severe with those entrusted to our care, namely, in case of long continued stubbornness and habitual bad will, but never when the fault is due merely to human weakness, in other words, only in cases of the positive, deliberate, and continued rejection of God's grace. But this severity must be dictated by real love, not by anger or a feeling of disappointment and personal grievance.

2) In view of the terrible fate awaiting those who spurn our admonitions or, in other words, reject Christ, we ought to leave no stone unturned to prevent this calamity. Just to preach the essentials of dogma and Christian morality is not sufficient. For many this might serve only to render them, not less sinful, but more accountable for their sins than their more ignorant brethren, and cast them into hell, or thrust them deeper into it. Is it not true that quite a number of people would lead better lives if they knew a little more of their religion?

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for Christ's instruction; of sorrow for all faults committed against it; of resolution to carry it out faithfully; of petition for the apostolic spirit when in the name of Christ we must place before erring men certain fateful decisions. "For Christ we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us" (2 Cor. 5,20).

Meditation 6

THE APOSTLES' POSITION IN THE WORLD

(Matt. 10,16)

"Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves."

In these and the following remarks Christ has reference not only to the position of the Apostles during their first expedition through Galilee, but to those in which they will find themselves after His Ascension. They will have to face the hostility of the whole world; but Jesus now gives them three means for their protection: His mission, prudent cautiousness, and holy "simplicity."

Let us entreat the grace of confidence in our vocation, of prudence and of that "simplicity" which Christ wishes to see in His Apostles.

I. SENT BY CHRIST INTO THE MIDST OF WOLVES. A. THE HOSTILITY OF THE WORLD. "Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves." As we have already seen, some of the directions given in the last of the preceding verses referred mainly to the position of the Apostles after Christ's Ascension. But those which we will consider in this and the following meditations found their full application only when the Twelve

entered upon their world-wide mission. Christ told them first of all that their position would be like that of sheep which the shepherd has taken into a forest infested with ravenous wolves.

Wolves are by their very nature deadly enemies of sheep. The latter may be ever so peaceful and gentle, but those rapacious animals never rest until they have killed all; for, unlike other beasts of prey, wolves never stop until the carnage is complete. The sheep, moreover, have no weapons of protection; the only one who can defend them is the shepherd.

Nothing could characterize the position of the Twelve better than this comparison. For while they were invested with truly marvelous spiritual and supernatural powers, they lacked all the means of physical force, in which the world they had to convert, abounded. That world, moreover, was under the control of the evil one, who could inspire his slaves with the ferocity of wolves. The world would instinctively feel the opposition which existed between it and Christ's Kingdom, and its votaries would be spurred on by the devil mercilessly to persecute the Apostles and to employ all the means of chicanery and brutal force which were at their disposal, while the Apostles could defend themselves only by offering spiritual benefits which their adversaries utterly despised, but they must not stoop to acts of violence and injustice. Thus the position of the Twelve, considered from a merely human point of view, was as desperate as the condition of sheep surrounded by packs of wolves.

Applications. 1) Since the world became civilized in a Christian sense, the external position of Christ's ambassadors as a rule is not as serious as it was in the days of the Apostles. Nevertheless, the spirit of the world has not changed. Christ's spirit will forever rouse its hatred, and priests and religious, as the embodiment of that spirit, will always be hated and persecuted by those who are enemies of the meek and humble Savior. But it will not be only the wicked that attack the modern apostles. Evil has its hiding-place in every human heart. Those who are charged with the care of souls, at times must rebuke and even oppose persons who, though not absolutely vicious, are the slaves of some passion or other. But passion, when rebuked or thwarted, naturally has recourse to violence. Therefore, also the apostle of today must be ready for the plight of sheep in the midst of wolves.

2) But there is still the arch-wolf and his pack of hellish beings, who show their fangs and claws whenever somebody accomplishes notable results for the Kingdom of Christ. What priest and what religious has not to suffer calumny, unjust criticism, bitter opposition, perhaps even on the part of well-meaning people, when he undertakes a work which greatly promotes God's glory, or effects a notable conversion? We must expect such attacks and never be surprised at them. We ought rather to feel consoled and encouraged, since they are a proof that we are making inroads on Satan's dominion.

B. PROTECTED BY CHRIST. The Savior did not say: "You go," but: "I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves." He chose this expression in order to let the Apostles know that He was fully aware of the dangers which would confront them, and to give them the assurance of His help and protection, without which they would be unable to accomplish their sacred task. True, it is almost an impossibility for any shepherd to guard every single member of his flock against an untoward death, and in this point the comparison of the sheep among wolves is not applicable; for the God-Man is fully able to protect His messengers against every evil which He wishes to keep away from them.

Application. As Christ sent the Apostles of yore, so today He sends His laborers as sheep into the midst of wolves. This can happen in many ways, but most especially when we work amidst temptations or in situations where our motives may be questioned, yea, even our good name defamed, the while we are unable to explain or defend ourselves. But we must place all our trust in the Master. He will protect us.

II. THE WISDOM OF SERPENTS. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents." Christ did not assume the protection of His Apostles entirely for Himself, but desired them to do their part. He commanded them to be wise as serpents. In this comparison He was not speaking of the large and venomous reptiles which have powerful means for attack and defence, but of those small

and harmless animals which belong to the weakest and most defenceless of God's creatures. Their only security lies in caution. They carefully examine the surroundings before they leave their hiding-place, advance with great circumspection, move about without noise, and at the approach of the slightest danger disappear quickly without a trace. After the manner of serpents the Apostles were not to court dangers and rouse the opposition of the world by a foolhardy bravado. They were to do their work quietly, be circumspect in word and action, and avoid perils where it could be done without giving up a principle or betraying Christ's cause.

Application. Besides exterior dangers, this admonition of Christ refers also to perils of the soul, to persons and objects which are a temptation against faith, chastity or one's vocation. Here it would be foolish to play the strong man and wilfully to expose oneself to serious temptations or remain in them without strict necessity. We must take every precaution to avoid familiarity with those of lax principles and those of weak faith, and use the utmost discretion in the selection of reading matter as well as in our relations with persons of the opposite sex.

III. SIMPLICITY OF DOVES. A. HONESTY AND PATIENCE. The word "simple" used in our translation has not that wide significance in English which is attached to the term used in the Latin Vulgate and in the Greek text.

In the latter two languages it also has the meaning of "pure, unmixed," hence of "guileless, sincere," and finally of "free from ethical turpitude, morally pure." With reference to the present text, the interpreters call our attention to the fact that doves do not attack those who rob them of their young, nor seem to remember persons who have harmed them, nor make use of artifices to capture prey, but are absolutely guileless.

In a similar manner the Apostles according to Christ had to be free from duplicity and deception; they were to take care lest the prudence recommended to them degenerated into cunning, fraud, or even into a diplomacy which was not perfectly honest. The Lord had a special reason for insisting on this point; for the secrecy and caution with which they had to proceed in the midst of a hostile world, contained a peculiar temptation to resort to words and deeds which were not in perfect harmony with truth and honesty.

He also warned them against vindictiveness and hatred, which might devise cunning ways for taking revenge for the harm the enemies would be doing to the souls for whom they worked, or to undertakings in which they labored with zeal and self-sacrifice. Temptations of this kind are peculiar to the apostolate.

Applications. 1) Artfulness and diplomatic cunning are nowhere as deleterious as in the care of souls, whether it be in the confessional, the schoolroom, or the Superior's office. They breed resentment and destroy confidence.

2) Let us not give way to vindictiveness and bitterness when souls entrusted to our care are harmed by evil-minded persons, or when undertakings on which we have spent much time and labor, are ruined by them. Trials of this kind are often harder to bear than evils done to us personally. They outrage our natural sense of justice, our zeal for God's glory, our love for souls. But patience and humble suffering, coupled with a forgiving spirit, will benefit the souls harmed by wicked men more than indignation.

B. BLAMELESSNESS. Commentators offer a second interpretation, of which the foregoing is only a particular application. As said before, the Biblical term "simple" can also mean "blameless, free from moral turpitude." This explanation, too, fits very well into the context. In view of the warning against persecutions which Christ gave in the preceding lines, it was of paramount importance that the Apostles should avoid everything which could furnish their adversaries with a pretext, and were it only a specious one, for justifying their persecutions by charging them with moral guilt. History shows how charges of immorality and other crimes always have played an important part in the war which Christ's enemies waged against the Church and her members.

Application. Blamelessness is all the more necessary today when faults and crimes are a staple topic of the

daily press. It is particularly necessary in our country, for the reason that the majority of our fellow-citizens are not of the faith, and many of them are inclined to look upon priests and religious as the worst of hypocrites. We must avoid not only what is wrong in itself, but what may give scandal, even though it is innocent in itself. St. Paul's motto must be ours: "We forecast what may be good not only before God, but also before men," or, in modern English: "We try so to regulate our conduct that it is blameless and pleasing, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8,21).

COLLOQUY. "Why, O Lord, are they multiplied that afflict me? many are they who rise up against me; many say to my soul: There is no salvation for him in his God. But thou, O Lord, art my protector, my glory, and the lifter up of my head" (Ps. 3,2–4).

Meditation 7

BEFORE JUDGES AND POTENTATES

(Matt. 10,17–20)

"But beware of men. For they will deliver you up in councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And you shall be brought before governors and before kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they shall deliver you up, take no

thought how or what to speak: for it shall be given to you in that hour what to speak. For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

Persecutions will overtake the Apostles and the latter will have to be ready for the worst. Nowhere will they be safe, not even before magistrates, the appointed protectors of innocence. They will have to appear before them like criminals, because they have been accepted by Christ as His own. God's plan here is very plain. By their innocence and by their testimony before Jewish and Gentile courts they will bring the Gospel to the knowledge of people to whom otherwise they would have no access. For this reason the Holy Ghost will speak through them and they need not worry about what to say.

Let us ask for the grace of childlike confidence in God, no matter in what situation we find ourselves.

I. WHAT THE APOSTLES HAD TO EXPECT. "But beware of men. For they will deliver you up in councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And you shall be brought before governors and before kings." The first sentence is an admonition. The Savior once more cautions the Apostles not to trust everybody; and He warns them that, even in spite of their precautions, they will not be able to avoid all persecutions; that men will hale them into the civil and religious courts, as if they were dangerous criminals. These courts, even the religious tribunals of the Jews in the synagogues,

will proceed against them as though they were evil-doers. They will inflict upon them the most shameful corporal punishments, such as public scourging in sacred places like the synagogues. The Apostles will have to stand before the highest tribunals of the world, before governors and kings. Their own former co-religionists, the Jews, otherwise so jealous of their prerogatives and anxious to avoid pagan courts, will not hesitate to drag them before the representatives of imperial Rome. Therefore, they must "beware of men." Their caution will help them to some extent; but it will not enable them to escape all persecution. Human courts are instituted to protect and secure justice; but they will not do so in the case of the Apostles.

Application. While probably we shall never be haled before judges and magistrates on account of our faith and the sacred duties of our vocation, and never be personally accused in the public press, it is not so certain that we shall never be falsely reported to our ecclesiastical Superiors and never fall a prey to false suspicions. The last-named weapon is so easily managed that the forces of evil make frequent use of it. Therefore, let us not be surprised or put out when it is wielded against us, but bear the blows patiently, nay cheerfully, for Christ's sake, and defend ourselves in a proper but calm manner, and for the rest, trust in God.

II. THE REASON FOR IT ALL. "For my sake; for a testimony [to give testimony] unto them and to the

Gentiles." In these words the Lord expresses the reason why the world resorts to persecution, and the purpose for which God permits it. The Apostles will be persecuted "for Christ's sake" because they are His representatives and continue His work. In other words, the reason lies in the hatred with which the devil persecutes the Savior, and in the radical opposition which exists between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God.

But God permits all this also for Christ's sake, namely, to make Him and His Kingdom known to Jews and Gentiles, "for a testimony unto them." Persecutions make our holy religion known in circles to which the Apostles otherwise would have no access, to "governors and kings."

These persecutions, moreover, will be a most powerful "testimony." For man's word is never more reliable than when he speaks with torture, loss, and death before him and with the full realization that his words will be his ruination. Nobody who is not thoroughly blinded by passion, can escape the weight of that profession. At the same time the manner in which the faith is professed, the sacrifices which are made for it, naturally set people thinking, and just as naturally lead them to the conclusion that these men, weak and mortal like themselves, are aided by God, that their word is true and their religion comes from Heaven.

Application. It is a fundamental law of Christianity that the Kingdom of Christ must be promoted by the

cross and that the apostle must be tested and found true by sufferings and failures. Therefore, we have no reason for despairing when our best plans are wrecked. To profess the triumphant Christ and to be His representative in success is easy enough; but it does not save the world. Like St. Paul, we have to preach Christ crucified not only by our words, but also by our example.

This example includes the willing acceptance of sufferings forced upon us, as well as voluntary acts of mortification. The Apostle says: "I fill up those things which are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh for his body, which is the church" (Col. 1,24). We do at least as much for the glory of God and the salvation of souls by our apparently fruitless work as by our manifestly successful efforts, because by our failures we at least remove obstacles which prevent the efficacy of Christ's sufferings, and thus permit the full stream of God's grace to flow into souls. After all, it is divine grace, not our effort, that does the work.

III. THE CONDUCT REQUIRED OF THE APOSTLES. "But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak. For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." God, employing the Apostles as His instruments, will work through them in such a manner that not only will His Kingdom be prospered by the persecutions, but it will be mani-

fested as His own work. For this reason He will permit the Apostles to be assailed by persecutions with which they cannot cope if they have to rely on their own powers. Of themselves these simple fishermen could never be a match for the shrewdness and malice of the Sanhedrin, the governors and kings, before whose tribunals they will have to defend Christ's cause. And yet they need not fear, or, as the Greek text says, "be not solicitous what to speak." The Holy Ghost will assume the task of defending the divine interests before the earthly potentates, speaking through the Apostles in such a manner that not only the wily judges are confounded, but every one who possesses an open mind, can see how Divine Wisdom is answering the malicious questions and retorting the mean insinuations, while at the same time endowing the Apostles with a dignity of speech and manner which inspires reverence and awe. The Apostles will have a twofold right to this divine protection, the first in the fact that they defend, not their own interests, but those of God, the second in the fact that they have not wantonly thrown themselves into the fray, but were forced into it by their sacred calling.

Applications. 1) The Savior in promising the Apostles that God not only would help them in dangerous situations, but conduct their cause, so to say, in person, thereby also gave us the assurance that when in the pursuit of our vocational duties we have to face perils which surpass our own powers, He would take our case

into His own hands. Perhaps the greatest risk for the priest is the risk of his good name which at times is connected with the duties of the confessional and the sacramental seal. God will know a way out of this danger, and we may rely on His providence at all times.

2) In the history of the Church we see how this prediction and promise of Christ have been and are still carried out. We are surprised at the wisdom, dignity, and moderation with which the martyrs and confessors of the faith frequently meet their adversaries, how even children and wholly uneducated persons put the sagacity of the world to shame. All this teaches us that, whilst we ought to make full use of our natural gifts, we must never forget that the principal part of the work of our own sanctification and the salvation of the world is done by God. This is the reason why persons of little talent, whose efforts are by no means brilliant, achieve greater results at times than the highly gifted, whose efforts are of a higher order. It all depends on the degree in which one permits himself to be an instrument in God's hands and secures the divine blessings by means of the cross. For supernatural success is attached to the cross of humble fidelity to duty, of humiliations and sufferings, of failures, misunderstandings and persecutions.

COLLOQUY. Pray for childlike confidence in God and total surrender to Him in all conditions of life. "The Lord ruleth me; and I shall want nothing" (Ps. 22,1).

Meditation 8

HATED BY ALL MEN

(Matt. 10,21–23)

"The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the son; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and shall put them to death. And you shall be hated by all men for my name's sake: but he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved. And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another. Amen I say to you, you shall not finish all the cities of Israel, till the Son of man come."

The Savior now speaks of two factors which render the persecutions to which His disciples will be subjected, peculiarly hard to bear, namely, the hostility which they shall suffer from their own flesh and blood, and the constancy with which they will be hounded. Solemnly He exhorts them to persevere amid these trials; and even when He offers consolation, His words are very grave.

Let us ask for the grace to persevere in the face of the difficulties which the world creates for us and for our work.

I. THE TRIALS. "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the son; and the children shall rise against their parents, and shall put them to death. And you shall be hated by all men for my

name's sake." It is hard for man to be the object of general hatred and the victim of plots and persecutions. However, as long as he can rely on those near and dear to him, on relatives and friends, he finds at least some natural consolation. But woe to the man who has to number among his enemies members of his own household, parents, brothers, children. Now Christ tells His disciples that the faithful Christian, above all the apostle, will have to suffer this trial at times. Let us not fail to notice that the Savior is speaking not only about a trial which awaits His Apostles; for they realized even at the time when Christ spoke, that as their parents were dead or disciples of the Lord, and their families at least friends of Christ, Jesus was foretelling the fate of His adherents in general, and that His words referred to all the ages of the Kingdom of which they were the first members. Christ, therefore, assured them that the hatred against Him and His adherents at times would be so strong that it would kill even the natural love of a brother, a father, a son; that no conquest would rage with greater fury than the battle between Him and the world; that no civil war would ever let loose such a blind and bloody hatred as the preaching of the Gospel. He went into details about it. Blood-relations of the disciples would deliver them up to death by accusing them before the magistrates and assisting in their capture; they would "rise up against them" by vicious plotting and treacherous betrayal; they would "put them to death" by taking an active part in their public execution.

He then summed up the situation in which His faithful followers, above all His Apostles, would find themselves, by saying: "You shall be the object of constant hatred to all men." The animosity and hostility would be so universal that it would seem as though the entire world were leagued against them for the sole reason that they were true to Christ and their vocation. The history of the Church in all ages down to our day furnishes instances of this unnatural hate and inhuman cruelty. Christ wanted His followers to know the whole truth and to face it manfully.

Applications. 1) Even though we live in conditions in which it is hardly probable that we shall have to face to its fullest extent the situation Jesus describes here, even though we shall not be hounded by pursuivants nor be betrayed by our own relations to bloodthirsty magistrates; nevertheless, as priests and religious, we may be called upon for the sake of the Master to sacrifice a precious friendship, a sympathetic understanding, even close family-ties. For does it not happen that young men and young women who have a higher vocation, are mentally racked and tortured by their own relations because they wish to follow a divine call, and are made to feel as though they were the objects of a whole world's hatred? Or that priests and religious are cruelly persecuted with demands of relatives and friends which their vocation forbids them to satisfy? Then they must remember the word of the Savior: "You shall be an object of hatred to all the world."

2) The persecutions foretold by Christ continually besiege the Catholic priesthood and the religious state. Instead of discouraging, this ought to console us, because it proves two points of utmost importance. It proves that we belong to the one true Church and to a state instituted by Christ, that consequently we enjoy all the blessings of Christianity. It also shows that we have embraced that state in which God wants us to be, and that we are on the sure road to Heaven. Realizing all this, we ought to be grateful for having been chosen in preference to many millions, and rouse ourselves to generous efforts for our own sanctification and the salvation of others.

II. CHRIST'S DEMANDS. "But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved. And when they persecute you in this city [in one city], flee into another." Commentators tell us that these words contain not only a promise, but a strict demand. To give the full meaning of the Greek text we should translate: "Only he who perseveres in patiently bearing the enmity of the world and performing his God-given task, only he shall be saved. Therefore, when persecutions make your work impossible in one city, you must try to work in another." Hence, as St. Jerome remarks, the Savior demands two things of His Apostles, namely, that they bear the persecutions until the bitter end, and that they try to find another field for their activity when work becomes impossible in the one in which they have been laboring so far.

Christ first of all requires that they bear their trials until the bitter end; He enforces this order by a threat of eternal damnation in case of non-compliance. Harsh as these words may sound, He does not tone them down and, contrary to His custom, offers no great consolation by holding out the promise of a greater reward. To do so in the present instance would be contrary to His intention. He wishes to inculcate a strict obligation, the neglect of which entails eternal damnation. For while following God's call to the apostolate may not in itself be an absolutely necessary condition for salvation, nevertheless, the acceptance of the divine call carries with it a strict duty to bear all the sufferings the world heaps upon such an apostolate. And even if one would not heed the invitation to a higher life, he still has the strict obligation to live up to the duties of a faithful son of the Church. But as such he cannot escape the hatred of the world; he must bear its maltreatment until the bitter end; otherwise he cannot be saved.

The Lord goes still farther in the next words when He demands that His Apostles seek another field for their activity if that which they have cultivated so far becomes impossible. This command receives added importance when He continues by telling them that they will not finish the cities of Israel before His coming, and thus implies that the persecutions will never cease, that the relations between His followers and the world will never be changed. He wants the Twelve to accept this condition and never become weary of it. They will not even be permitted to end it all by voluntarily courting

death and martyrdom. If no higher considerations dissuade flight, they must try to escape the pursuivants and find a new field in which to continue their labor somewhere else.

Applications. 1) Let us not give way to a delusion. Our life as priests and religious is one of struggle with fallen nature and the powers of Satan. Opposition of necessity belongs to it. Let us accept the situation as it is, do our work, but not commiserate ourselves. Who would pity a poor beggar that is deprived of a few pennies and a crust of bread, but at the same time is given a purse of gold and a sumptuous banquet? Through our faith and our vocation we lose the pennies and the crusts of many earthly comforts and consolations, but we receive not only the riches of eternal life after we leave this earth, but the gold coins of precious graces and the banquet of the "peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding" (Phil. 4,7).

2) We see here again how determined Christ is to win man entirely and for God alone. The world has nothing for the apostle but tribulation and war, as long as he lives. Why then seek anything from it? Let us be whole-souled apostles, living and working only for God. He who is persecuted has to flee in haste, must leave everything behind, his home, his possessions, his former social influence, his reputation, and start life over again in a strange land. This is our lot. Nothing is secure for us except what we do for God, and what God does for us.

III. CONSOLATION. "And when they shall persecute you in one city, flee into another. Amen I say to you, you shall not finish the cities of Israel, till the Son of man come." The purpose for which Christ adds these words, is very clear. He wishes to offer at least some consolation. Therefore, His words first of all assure the Apostles that, until they have accomplished their God-given task, they will always find a place of refuge, that the Church will never be destroyed, and, consequently, that their work will not be in vain.

So far all interpreters agree; but they differ in further details, especially in their explanation of the phrases "the cities of Israel" and "till the Son of man come." In their majority they understand by the "coming of the Son of man" Christ's second advent or the end of the world and the final judgment. It is true that the phrase generally has this meaning in the synoptic gospels. This interpretation demands as a necessary consequence that the "cities of Israel" are not understood to mean the places of Palestine alone, but all the cities in which Israelites will live at the end of time. The meaning of the entire sentence will then be: "You will accomplish the conversion of the Jewish nation only at the end of time." If we take this explanation—and it is the most acceptable one offered—then we must believe that the Savior addressed these words not to the Twelve alone, but to the entire apostolic body, as it will be composed throughout the succeeding ages. The Lord repeatedly addressed His remarks not only to the Apostles living with Him, but to the entire hierarchy, the

Apostles and all their successors. The most striking and familiar instance of this we find in the words: "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." Moreover, we are taught in several places of the New Testament that the conversion of the Israelitic nation as such will occur only at the end of time.

In the light of this interpretation the second reason with which Christ consoles His Apostles consists in the assurance that, though their nation, to which they are passionately attached, will persecute them, and will refuse to accept the Messias throughout the ages, nevertheless, Israel will not be lost entirely to the Kingdom of God, but will enter in before it is too late. This thought will certainly give the Apostles some consolation in the days when they will have to leave Israel and devote all their labor to the Gentiles.

Other interpreters prefer to take the phrase "the cities of Israel" in the strictest sense, as denoting the cities of Palestine. In this case we must understand by the "coming of the Son of man" the judgment which Christ began to exercise on the hostile world when those terrible uprisings that ended with the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus broke out in Judea and Galilee about A. D. 66. This judgment continues through the ages and will end only with the cataclysm of the present world and the sentence which the Savior will pronounce against His enemies on the day of final retribution. As Christ combines in His prophecies the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, this interpretation too has a solid foundation.

Finally, some commentators of note are of the opinion that the Lord has in mind both the ruin of the Israelitic nation, which began in the year 66, and the end of the world.

According to the second explanation, therefore, Christ, besides the assurance of safety and success which all interpreters find in His words, offers as a second reason for consolation the prediction that the persecution will not last beyond human endurance. The generation then living will witness the destruction of Jewry, yet the Twelve will not have finished their work in Palestine before the persecutions by their countrymen shall have been stopped by the Roman legions overrunning Galilee and Judea.

Applications. 1) Like the Apostles we must never despair; for though one way or even many ways for working at our own sanctification and at the salvation of our neighbor be closed to us, others will be left open. As Christ wishes the Apostles to go into another city when progress becomes impossible in a certain place, so we too must readjust ourselves to different work when that which we have undertaken becomes impossible to us. We must not stubbornly insist on merely performing those practices of our sanctification, or on occupying ourselves with those labors to which we have been accustomed, or indulge ourselves in melancholy idleness; but we must use our initiative to discover new ways and means for making progress in virtue and rendering ourselves useful to our neighbors.

2) In these words the Savior also strives to protect His Apostles against another feeling of depression and despair in the fear that these trials and troubles will never cease, rendering the thought of the future almost unbearable. We must never forget that time passes quickly and that God does not reserve all His consolations for the life after death. The future which still lies ahead of us in this world, will only be a repetition of the past with its alternating experiences of joy and peace, of sorrow and unrest, the struggles of which have not been so hard after all.

3) We find in this entire pericope a telling illustration of Christ's sincerity and honesty in dealing with men. He never deceives, nor does He minimize the difficulties that will be encountered, but He tells people clearly what they will have to expect and to suffer in His service. This sincerity and honesty belong to what we may call the susceptibilities of the God-Man. Always frank and open, He is an avowed enemy of insincerity and of that veneered diplomacy so prevalent amongst leaders of today.

COLLOQUY. Thank Christ for the lesson He has given you in this meditation; profess your determination to carry it out; offer your particular resolutions. Ask for His help. Pray for the persecuted priests and missionaries. "Our God is our refuge and strength: a helper in troubles, which have found us exceedingly" (Ps. 45,2).

Meditation 9

MASTER AND DISCIPLE

(Matt. 10,24–27)

"The disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant, as his lord. If they have called the good-man of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household? Therefore fear them not. For nothing is covered that shall not be revealed: nor hid, that shall not be known. That which I tell you in the dark, speak ye in the light: and that which you hear in the ear, preach ye from the house-tops."

In this pericope Christ offers as further reasons for encouragement His own example and the success which the Apostles will have in consequence of a divine decree. Through their efforts the Gospel which He now preaches in the small and remote towns of Galilee and almost secretly, will become known far and wide. No power of earth and hell will be able to prevent this.

We ask for the grace of performing our God-appointed work with great confidence.

I. MASTER AND DISCIPLE. "The disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant, as his lord. If they have called the good-man of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his house-

hold?" The axiom that the disciple is not above his master and the servant not above his lord, is self-evident. It is equally clear to the Apostles that their relation to Christ is like that of disciples to their master and of servants to their lord. Moreover, these honest and simple Galileans are thoroughly devoted to their Teacher and Lord. He has won their love and loyalty by His wonderful qualities of mind and heart and by numerous proofs of love and tender care. They have learned to identify themselves with Him, to take Him for their model, and to share His ideas. An old proverb says: "Words instruct, examples attract." Men are greatly influenced by ideals, all the more so when those ideals assume a concrete form, a living expression, in the person of one who has gained their affection and admiration. Such a person is Jesus Christ. The Apostles not only love Him, but they look up to Him as One who, in spite of the lowly simplicity of His life and ways, the many humiliations and bitter opposition endured by Him, is far above them. They are not filled with an unholy ambition to seek a better lot than that which befell their beloved Master, but they are blissfully content to be near Him, to imitate His example, to be shadows, as it were, following His every footstep. The Savior voices their sentiments when He says: "It is enough for the disciple that he be like his master."

The Lord now goes on to make a practical application, which we intend to give in the words which, according to good authorities, form the better reading of the text:

"If people have accused the head of the family of dealing with Beelzebub, how much the more will they cast it up to his domestics." While we find no proof in the gospels of Christ's ever having been called Beelzebub, we read in several places that the Pharisees accused Him of being in league with Beelzebub. Injustice and calumny certainly could go no farther than connecting the Son of God with the prince of the demons and treating Him accordingly. When the Apostles consider the persecutions which their Master suffers, they must admit that the troubles which He predicts for them, are but a repetition of His own lot on earth. If they acknowledge Him as their Master and Lord, therefore, they have not only no cause for complaint, but rather should proudly rejoice to share His fate, and bravely embrace sufferings and persecutions for His sake.

Application. The principal motive for generosity in God's service, which St. Ignatius proposes in his Spiritual Exercises, the motive above all for embracing a state in which we have to assume a special share in Christ's cross, is the very idea Christ here proposes to His Apostles. Would to God that we could realize the great truth that, as Christ's servants and disciples, we ought not to be better off than He, and "that it is enough for us to be like our Master and Lord." How many complaints, how much sadness and discouragement we should be spared if we always bore this in mind. Let us ask the

Savior to imbue our hearts with greater love and humility, in order that we may always proceed in the spirit of this maxim. Let us courageously carry it out in our little trials.

II. GOD AND THE WORLD. "Therefore fear them not. For nothing is covered that shall not be revealed: nor hid, that shall not be known. That which I tell you in the dark, speak ye in the light; and that which you hear in the ear, preach ye from the house-tops." The Lord has foretold what the Apostles are to expect. Now He adds words of encouragement. There are especially three things which they naturally will fear when they take up Christ's work: their own personal limitations, the sacrifices demanded of them on account of their vocation, and the prospect of the failure of their mission on account of the rejection of Christ's Gospel by an unbelieving world. Now Christ assures them that they have nothing to fear on this score. He begins with the words: "Therefore fear them not." By using the conjunction "therefore," He refers to what He has said before, namely, that they would be persecuted like their Master. How can this be a reason for discarding fear? The Apostles by this time knew that Christ was the Messias who would establish the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it was certain that He would succeed in spite, nay precisely by means, of the persecutions to which He was subjected. The Savior, therefore, argued thus: You not only are my companions and co-workers in an undertaking which cannot fail, but you have to carry

out your God-given task in the same way as I. That way is sure of success. Therefore, you will achieve the work with which I have entrusted you, and, as partakers in my sufferings, you will also be sharers in my crown.

Christ now predicts how they will succeed. "Nothing is covered that shall not be revealed: nor hid, that shall not be known." The injustice of the calumnies spread against them and the maltreatment inflicted on them will come to light, and the true character, together with the low motives of their persecutors, will be revealed. In like manner the truth of their doctrines and their personal blamelessness will become manifest. The success of their work, the blessings of Christianity, the moral regeneration of the world, the holiness of so many Christians, will be an undeniable proof to every fair-minded observer, not only of the truth of their teaching, but also of their personal character. Thus they will not have to wait for their justification until the last judgment.

Then, too, the Apostles will naturally entertain misgivings on account of the doctrines they have been told to preach. They are new to the world and known to a few only. While it is true that many residents of Palestine gradually become acquainted with Christ and His doctrine, the rest of the world does not hear much of what is happening in that small country, lying far off the great highways of commerce, and among people who keep aloof from the other nations and are despised wherever they are known. And do not the doctrines the

Apostles will have to proclaim run counter to all the ideas prevalent in the world at large, and do they not contain mysteries of the deepest nature that are always unacceptable to human pride? Therefore Christ continues: "That which I tell you in the dark, speak ye in the light: and that which you hear in the ear, preach ye from the house-tops."

Finally, who are they that will have to preach to the great world? Uneducated fishermen, who feel utterly incompetent for this task. And the Master Himself preaches only in Palestine, that hidden corner of the earth, "in the dark." It is just as though He only whispered into their ears. But He tells them to speak courageously before the entire world and announce their message with a publicity comparable to the notoriety given to a speaker who heralds his message from the flat roof of a Palestinian house.

We must not forget that the Lord is here giving the Apostles directions for their entire future work—directions which will have to be carried out principally after His Ascension. The Holy Ghost will "bring all things to their mind," also the directions now given them. At the proper time the disciples will realize more fully that these directions come from the mouth of a Divine Person and that they carry with them the promise of success.

Applications. 1) Our vocation will at times make us experience the timidity against which Christ steels His

Apostles—a fear of opposition, persecution, the difficulty of the task, a keen realization of our natural incompetence. But we have to ask ourselves only one question: "Who has given you the position or the task?" If we can honestly answer that we have not secured it by intruding ourselves or by using diplomacy and other means not proper in a follower of Christ, but that the authority who holds the Savior's place has entrusted it to us, we ought to have the same confidence as the Apostles. God wishes to be honored not only by our work, but also by our confidence.

2) But this truth has a still more personal application. It may happen that we are publicly rebuked and, in a way, degraded, even by those placed in authority over us, or by some of our own people. Let us not believe that our good name and efficiency thereby suffer great harm. They might possibly be injured very deeply if it were not Christ for whom we work and by whom we are assisted. But He tells us: "Have confidence; I have overcome the world." If we accept the humiliation in the proper spirit and continue to work cheerfully, our success will be all the greater.

COLLOQUY. Prayer for magnanimity in Christ's service, for a holy pride in the participation of His cross and dereliction, and for confidence in the success of His cause despite oppression, distress and persecution. "O crux, ave, spes unica."

Meditation 10

A CUTTING DILEMMA

(Matt. 10,28–33)

"And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; better are you than many sparrows. Every one therefore that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. But he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

The followers of Christ will at times be placed in difficult positions and so sorely tried that not even their enthusiastic love for the Savior will be a sufficient warranty for their continued faithfulness; yet this pain and persecution which the world will inflict on them can never outweigh the terrors of God's justice and the hope of divine protection. Jesus compares the power of the persecutors with the power of God, and points out the consequences of loyalty and disloyalty, respectively. These words of His belong to the most serious passages in the New Testament.

Let us entreat the Lord that if ever our love should not be strong enough to keep us at His side, at least

the fear of His wrath and our confidence in His help will give us strength to persevere.

I. THE POWER OF THE WORLD AND THE POWER OF GOD. "And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell." There are situations in human life in which the paralyzing fear of certain evils connected with one line of action can be overcome only by the fear of greater sufferings connected with the opposite course. Thus, the fear of certain death overcomes the fear of a painful operation. Now it cannot be denied that the world has power to inflict most painful corporal and mental sufferings and to terrorize people into compliance with its demands; none but a very inexperienced person would assert that only a craven coward weakens in the face of these tortures.

It is very true that, with the help of grace, man can steel himself and suffer all things patiently and even heroically like a worthy soldier of Christ. But this grace consists not only in the strengthening of the will, but also in an enlightenment of the mind. Man with the assistance of the divine light must ponder over, and try to understand thoroughly, some truths which refer to this matter; otherwise he will at most be animated by a shallow enthusiasm, which dies out very quickly when the threats of the persecutors are carried out. The first of these truths is that, though the power of the world over man is great, that of God is infinitely greater. For, while the world cannot go farther than to destroy the body

and torture it for a comparatively short space of time, God has absolute control, not only over the body, but also over the soul, and He can inflict tortures which are infinitely greater and will never end. The torments of hell are out of all proportion with even the worst pain which the world can inflict. Moreover, the power of the world depends entirely on the divine will and cannot go any farther than God permits; that of God is absolute and cannot be checked by anybody. Whom, therefore, should man fear more? Whose wrath will do him the least harm? We must not fear those who can destroy the body only, but "rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell."

There is still another consideration, and an important one, to be made here: What must not the Apostles and all who take part in their work expect, if the consideration of the sufferings of hell has to be invoked to give them strength?

Applications. 1) Let us frequently and attentively consider these words of Christ, in order to retain a vivid conception of mortal sin and a firm determination of avoiding it at all costs. Especially should we bear them in mind when we are confronted with temptations arising from human respect, and in those formidable hours when Satan and the world stir up our passions against our vocation and its duties. Such hours come upon everybody.

We shall, at times, have to propose these considera-

tions to others, but our words will be cold and weak unless we are thoroughly convinced of their truth.

2) "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 110,10). If we really wish to love God and persevere in this love, we must also fear Him. Let us ask for this wholesome fear and do our part to acquire and retain it. Let us strive to obtain a deeper appreciation of His omnipotence, justice, and sanctity, and a clearer conception of the limitless grandeur of the other world. Eternity is not built upon the small proportions of our earth and human affairs. This life is like infancy, the other like full manhood; only the distance between them is infinitely greater than that between infancy and manhood.

II. THE DIVINE PROTECTION. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." In these words Christ proposes another truth for the consideration of the Twelve. He wants to arouse in them the sentiment of confidence, not in their weak powers of endurance, but in the supporting strength of God. This sentiment is equally necessary for perseverance. Great though the power of this world may be, it is not absolute and uncontrollable. There is One on whose will and permission it depends, One who takes a paternal care of all His creatures, but above all of His faithful children.

This care the Savior now describes by two telling illustrations. The sparrow is so worthless in the eyes of men that even the smallest coin is not small enough to express its value, but two are needed for an equivalent. Yet the Creator takes such tender care of every one of the countless millions of these worthless birds that not one of them falls to the ground or is killed by a boy for a pastime, without the permission of Him who is the Father of all men. It is significant that Christ does not say: "without the Creator," but: "without your Father."

But, not satisfied with this comparison, Jesus goes farther. He wants us to realize that divine providence embraces the smallest details of our lives and that nothing which concerns God's children, no matter how insignificant, escapes His attention. Not even a hair of their head shall be touched without His permission.

Consequently, if God permits the world to sate its hatred against one of His children, and still more if it raves against those whom He has chosen for a task as important as that of the Apostles, the persecutors will not harm, but prosper them and their work. They need have no fear when they incur the wrath of the world for God's sake.

Applications. 1) We can see the prediction of Christ verified through the long course of nineteen centuries. In our rationalistic age we can probably understand much better than the Christians of the first centuries and the Catholics of the Middle Ages, the importance and value

of recurrent persecutions. They purge and sanctify the Church and its members, and they furnish one of the most palpable proofs for its divine origin. They draw men nearer to God, strengthen their faith, raise their hope, and perfect their charity. They keep alive the supernatural view of life, which is the basis of holiness. Let us view and bear all the trials of our vocation in the spirit which Christ wished to produce by these words of His.

2) We also see how important it is for us always to seek and do the will of God. The Father in Heaven will not assist us in anything that is outside of, or contrary to, His will. But when we can tell him: "Dear Lord, this is *Thy* concern," our confidence ought to be unbounded.

III. AN UNAVOIDABLE ALTERNATIVE. We give here a literal translation of the Greek text: "Whosoever shall make *in Me* a profession before men, *in him* I shall make a profession before My Father who is in Heaven. But I shall disown before My Father who is in Heaven, him who shall disown me before men." Christ now places His Apostles and all His followers before a very serious alternative. He demands of them an open and public profession of loyalty before the world, which hates Him and His work. He is not satisfied with a secret adherence. His Church is a society that must be visible to the whole world and, therefore, it is necessary that its members profess their faith openly. Moreover, he who is

ashamed or afraid to profess his faith, and in a higher degree he who denies it even only externally, acts like an ungrateful child that is ashamed of his parents. And what would become of the Gospel if those to whom its preaching is entrusted, would grow silent in the presence of enemies?

Therefore, it is our duty "to confess Christ" whenever the glory of God or the welfare of souls renders it necessary. It is sinful to omit this profession when its omission would notably lower the opinion which those not belonging to the Church entertain about our holy religion, or when it would deprive God of a great honor; it is also sinful when silence would scandalize the faithful, or when it would be equivalent to a denial of the faith, or when a brave profession would bring about the conversion of many unbelievers.

The world tempts men with promises of earthly prosperity and security and with threats of temporal privations, tortures, and destruction. Christ counters with the greater promises of eternal happiness and with the greater threats of never-ending pain and supernatural death. As the world will not let its threats be empty declamations, so He will not permit His promises and menaces to remain idle. Thus the Apostles and all His other adherents will have to meet situations in which they must choose between temporal and eternal life, temporal and eternal death.

But Christ, according to the Greek text, chooses a very significant expression for this profession of faith: "Whosoever shall make *in Me* a profession before men,"

and He describes the reward for this loyalty as His own acknowledgment *in the faithful disciple*. Man, with his own unassisted strength, will never be able to confess his allegiance to Christ when this act means torture, loss, and death to him; it is Christ who conquers in the martyrs. Man confesses the Savior in virtue of the supernatural strength he derives from that close union which sanctifying grace establishes between him and his Divine Lord, that union which Jesus at the Last Supper compared to the union between the vine and the branches. And, likewise on account of this union, Christ will so acknowledge His loyal disciple before the Father in Heaven that He and the martyr stand in a way identified.

It is not without significance that the Lord expresses His promises and threats as being acknowledged by Him as His own and being disowned by Him before the Father. The special reward of martyrdom, the "aureole," as theologians call it, in its very nature resembles that act of loyalty which lies in dying for Christ. While the eternal reward in general consists in the beatific vision, this vision of the infinite source of bliss offers delights of a peculiar kind to the martyrs. We do not know wherein this joy consists; but we do know that, being infinite and, therefore, virtually multiform, the divine nature is the fountain-head of an infinite variety of joys. And in a similar manner, hell, though its essence is the privation of God, can cause special torture for special sins.

And finally, not the God-Man, but God the Father is

represented in this text as the One who confers the reward and inflicts the punishment; the Savior only acknowledges or disowns the person who is to be judged. Heaven, according to Christ's words, is the house of the Father, who assigns to each his own place or mansion, provided Christ acknowledges him as His own. May we be numbered among those whom Jesus acknowledges before the Father as His own or as in a way identified with Him!

Applications. 1) Let us admire the candor with which Christ tells His Apostles what they have to expect on earth and what depends on their conduct. With all their zeal and enthusiasm they never forgot this serious lesson. Let us place implicit trust in Him who has chosen us for His work with full knowledge of our frailty and of the difficulties to be encountered.

2) Let us never forget that we are placed before an unavoidable alternative—either to be acknowledged by Christ as His own, or to be disowned by Him—and let us never become a prey to human respect.

3) But let us also look at the bright side of this alternative. What does it mean, to be acknowledged by Christ before the Heavenly Father and in consequence of this acknowledgment to be enrolled among "the glorious choir of the Apostles"? Christ's own in life, Christ's own in death, Christ's own in Heaven; fighting and struggling together with Christ, dying for and with

Him, reigning with Him. These consoling truths are proposed to us in the Savior's words of making "in Him" a profession of loyalty before men and of His making "in us" a profession of acknowledgment before the Father who is in Heaven.

COLLOQUY. Profess your loyalty to Christ; ask for the grace of always remaining true to Him; entreat Him to fill your heart with a holy fear of God. "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear; for I am afraid of thy judgments" (Ps. 118,120). "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . In all things we overcome because of him that hath loved us" (Rom. 8,35.37).

Meditation 11

CHRIST ABOVE EVERYTHING

(Matt. 10,34–39)

"Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but the sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of

me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it."

We may call these verses Christ's declaration of war to the world and a formulation of the demands He makes upon all His loyal adherents for this war. Fully conscious of His infinite dignity, His rights and His powers, He claims absolute fidelity, generous service, and a whole-hearted devotion from His followers, who must ever be ready and willing to sacrifice what is naturally dearest to them, sever every earthly tie which prevents loyalty to Him, and, if need be, even give up life itself. In return He can and will give them the greatest of blessings—life eternal.

Let us pray for the grace of whole-souled loyalty to our Divine Leader.

I. THE DECLARATION OF WAR. "Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but the sword." Christ was foretold as the Prince of Peace; and indeed, at His coming political war and civil strife ceased for a time. His teaching, moreover, furnishes the only solid basis for a lasting understanding between nations. But the principal part of His mission of peace was the establishment of peace between God and mankind. This task He could perform only by breaking the pernicious peace which was ruining the world, and which consisted in yielding to all the promptings of the evil passions and in complying with all the demands of Satan and his associates. He had to stir

up men's conscience, urge them on to a life-long struggle against fallen nature and the powers of darkness, and to a determined resistance against the behests of a world steeped in sin. Thus He came to bring, not peace, but the sword.

The weapons Christ places in the hands of His followers are not forged of steel and iron, but are entirely or at least principally of a spiritual nature. They will not kill the life of the body, but they are apt to cause mental sufferings to those who fight under Satan's banner, besides frustrating their vicious attempts at conquering the champions of the Savior.

Moreover, since Satan can keep his throne in this world only as long as he makes war on God and God's servants, the conflict will rage with greater or lesser fury until the end of time.

Finally, it is a war in which nobody can be neutral. Man must either resist and beat off the devil, his own evil passions, and the wicked suggestions of the world, or give in to them. Neither God nor the enemies of God leave him rest. Every attempt at neutrality and every discontinuance of the fight is treason to the cause, just as it would be treason for a soldier to throw his weapons away when the battle is on.

Applications. 1) The Savior does not belong to those lying prophets who lulled Israel into a false security and said: "Peace, peace; and there was no peace" (Is. 6,14). He conceals nothing from His followers, but plainly tells them the whole truth. We have to accept

this constant struggle and take part in this "world war." As apostles we, least of all men, can confine ourselves to defensive measures. Our duty demands often enough that we "go over the top," attack the enemy in his own fortifications, and drive him out of the trenches which he is trying to dig in our soul and in the souls of those entrusted to our care. Ours cannot be a peaceful, comfortable existence; on the contrary, it must be one of constant temptations, troubles, opposition, humiliations, and cares.

2) It is a very grave truth the Savior tells us; but it is also very consoling. For He not only presses the sword into our hands, but He is our leader and companion in the fight. We have Him with us in the Blessed Sacrament, and by partaking of this "Bread of Life" we can daily renew and replenish our strength. Like the early Christians, we can leave the Holy Table "brave and strong as lions." "The charity of Christ conquers in the martyrs."

II. FRIEND AND FOE. A. A DISTRESSING CONFLICT. "I came [the necessary and foreseen result of my coming is] to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies shall be they of his own household." The Savior now goes into some of the details of the war which will rage throughout the world until the end of time. The enemies against whom His followers will have to fight, will force them,

and above all those who have a part in Christ's mission, into a most distressing conflict between the duties they owe to God and the love and affection they would give to those nearest to them. Fathers and mothers by embracing Christianity or living up to its teachings, will make bitter enemies of their grown-up sons and daughters; and vice versa, young men and young women, by becoming disciples of the Savior, or by following His invitation to embrace a higher life, will incur the wrath of their parents.

"His own relations and friends shall be a man's personal enemies." These words are not only a prediction of what will be the fate of many apostles and followers of Christ, but they contain an important instruction. They imply that any one who intrudes himself between the Savior and His disciple, though he be one nearest of kin, thereby becomes that disciple's personal enemy. This truth Jesus wants to impress deeply on the minds of His followers, when He demands that for His sake they sever or disregard even the firmest and most sacred ties which God created and sanctified by a special commandment. Christ did not come into this world for the purpose of rousing religious animositities, sowing discord between men, and disrupting families. If these evil effects follow from His preaching, the fault lies wholly and solely with His adversaries. But since the latter start the fight, He cannot and will not avoid the combat. The interests of the Father in Heaven are at stake; therefore, He commands His followers to accept the gauntlet thrown to them, limiting them, however, to the use

of the "weapons of the spirit" and proposing as the end and norm of their warfare the will and wish of God, the glory of their Creator and the welfare of souls.

Application. These words of Christ are not an empty declamation. The history of the Church, the biographies of not a few of her saints, and perhaps our own experience prove how true they are. But do we not at times meet Catholics who apply them only to converts and fail to see their significance in a case directly affecting them? Parents at times, from a wrong attachment and affection, oppose the vocation of their children, or from greed for money and comforts they want their son or daughter to give up or delay their intention of consecrating themselves to God or following a missionary career. Brothers and sisters may even go so far as to demand that a girl leave the convent for the purpose of taking care of an aged parent, when they themselves are able to do so. To people of this kind must be applied the words of the Savior that they, perhaps unknowingly, are personal enemies of their relative and of Christ. The selfishness of which they frequently accuse their relative, is in their own heart.

B. THE GREATER FRIEND. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." In these words the Savior rises to His full dignity as a Divine Person. In the mouth of anybody but God such an assertion would be not only insane, but

blasphemous. But as God He has the first and supreme right to our love and loyalty. That right He cannot waive without acting against His infinite sanctity. Therefore, He wants to detach men from their relatives, so that they are not misled into a neglect of the duty they owe Him. Where necessary, He even wants to set His followers at variance with those nearest to them, lest the latter become an obstacle to the loyalty they owe Him. He does not intend discord, but He does command His followers not to be afraid of making their relatives and friends their enemies, should they attempt to usurp the place due to Him. One who prefers the affection and good pleasure of his blood-relations to the love and will of Christ, is unworthy to have a share in Him and His blessings. Christ cannot disgrace Himself by permitting or condoning such an offence.

Though His words may sound harsh, they nevertheless contain a great consolation. To do full justice to the Greek text, we should translate it thus: "He who is a greater friend of his father or mother than of Me, is not worthy of Me; and he who is a greater friend to his son or daughter than to Me, is not worthy of Me." Christ wants to be our best friend. We are not only to devote our greatest affection to Him, but to receive the greatest love from Him. He can and will love us more than our parents or our children. He, moreover, is the only friend on whom we can rely at all times and amid all conditions. He is the most unselfish friend; for all the profit resulting from a friendship with Him comes to us. He is the most generous friend, since He does

not hesitate to die for us. He is the noblest friend, because endowed with infinite dignity. And yet, though invested with divine majesty, He stoops down to our lowliness and makes Himself our most affectionate brother. Verily, one who prefers to offend or desert Him rather than a mere creature, even his own parent, is not worthy of Him, does not deserve to be His disciple and share in His glory. But one who tries above all else to be a true friend of the Savior, has a claim to His affection and friendship, which the Eternal Lord will honor to the fullest extent of His divine liberality. "I am a friend of Christ and He is a true and loving friend to me"—this thought must console us when our relatives turn against us because we are loyal to the Savior.

Application. As apostles, we above all have the duty to love Christ more than our relations. Are we, then, to grow cold and indifferent towards parents, brothers, and sisters? Not by any means; for Christ's law perfects and supernaturalizes nature. But our love of relatives must be spiritualized and supernaturalized. If all love is wishing and willing well to somebody, supernatural love is wishing and willing one supernatural blessings, and natural goods only in as far as they help him to attain his supernatural end. If we were to yield to the demands of parents and relatives when they are opposed to God's will and the duties of our vocation; if we were to yield to our natural affection in a manner which proves an obstacle to the perfect love of our God and Savior,

we should harm not only ourselves but also our relatives; for we should make them participators in our sins and imperfections. Let us ever remain convinced that the best proof of our love for our relatives is faithful observance of our rules and duties. Our fidelity will draw upon them divine blessings, which will profit them infinitely more than all the kindness we can show them by our own work. Therefore, when the words of Christ are considered carefully, they are far from being harsh and cruel. Their apparent harshness is in reality great kindness.

III. THE ENEMY WITHIN US. "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it." The most insidious enemy who disputes Christ's dominion in the human heart, is our inborn selfishness. External enemies would try in vain to separate us from Christ, did they not find a cunning accomplice in our own false self-love. The reason why the sacrifice of external goods and the detachment from persons are so hard, is that they hurt self-love. The Savior now attacks this dangerous enemy by declaring that any one who wishes to be His disciple and obtain a share in His graces, must take up the fight against himself. Man, since the first sin in Paradise, has made himself the centre of the world and wants to measure everything by his personal interests; now he must again make God the centre; Christ claims that place because He is God.

Here, then, we have the ultimate purpose for which Christ brought, not peace, but the sword. The cross, according to Roman law, belonged to the rebels against the majesty of the empire. Man through sin had become a rebel against God and, therefore, deserved to be crucified; Christ had to accept the cross because He had to atone for our rebellion and to become our leader. We too must crucify our inordinate self-love if we wish to belong to Him.

If we shrink back—and were it only to save our natural life—we are lost. Only what we sacrifice for Christ is safe and secure for us. If we sacrifice our life by giving up our earthly existence for His sake when this is necessary, or by adopting a career of self-abnegation, which to the natural man seems almost worse than death, we shall find the true life:—here on earth the supernatural life of sanctifying grace and virtue, the friendship of God, the peace of God's children; and in the world to come the glorious life of eternity.

Applications. 1) The disciples must have listened to these words of Christ in speechless amazement. For the time being they can hardly have grasped their full intent. Nevertheless, these admonitions remained deeply engraven in their minds. The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the accounts we have of their martyrdom prove this. What the Savior demanded of them, and what He still demands of all His followers, is very appropriately expressed in the words of St. Paul: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor prin-

cipalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8,38f.).

Our first resolution prompted by the words of Christ ought to be: "I will rather die than commit a sin." We should frequently repeat this holy resolution and base it on the words of Christ considered in this meditation.

2) Jesus demands heroic sacrifices; but for any one who loves Him, they present also a bright and wonderful aspect. They furnish us with a ready means to show our love to our dear Lord. He deserves that love all the more because He has done for us exactly what He demands from us in this pericope. He took up His cross, a much heavier one than we shall have to carry. Let us return love for love. And secondly, let us also consider what we lose by the kind of life which He demands of us, and what we shall receive in return. We obtain by it not only the true life in Heaven, but the true life on earth, union with God, love of our Savior. Only one who has experienced this new life, can understand what it means, as St. Bernard says in his famous hymn:

"But what to those who find? Ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show:
The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His loved ones know."

COLLOQUY. Let us offer to our Lord the protestation of our undying fidelity and of our readiness to give up

every affection which does not help us to be wholly His own; let us ask pardon for all infidelity shown in the past and beg for the grace of striving to verify the words of the Apostle: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me. And that I live now in the flesh: I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered himself for me" (Gal. 2,20).

Meditation 12

THE NEW WORLD

(Matt. 10,40–42)

"He that receiveth you, receiveth me: and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive the reward of a prophet; and he that receiveth a just man in the name of a just man, shall receive the reward of a just man. And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

In the concluding paragraphs of this pastoral instruction, Christ replaces the natural ties of blood and friendship, which so far have held human society together, by new and stronger bonds, consisting in man's supernatural relations to God and through them to his fellowmen, in the titles of a prophet, a just man, a disciple of Christ. Love of the Father in Heaven and hope of the

reward promised for every service and act of kindness rendered to a member of the Kingdom of Heaven, are more powerful motives than the natural affection for one's kin.

The authors of these new ties and this new union are Christ and His Apostles, with whom the Savior identifies Himself in their work and who take His place. In these verses we have the first sketch of the Church, that supernatural "brotherhood," as St. Peter and St. Paul call it in their epistles.

Let us ask for the grace of a proper estimation of the union Christ has established between God and us, and between us and our Superiors and brothers in the faith.

I. THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES. "He that receiveth you, receiveth me: and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." In the preceding verses, the Lord made rather hard demands on His Apostles in the war with His adversaries. But, in return, He gave them a position far above every earthly dignity. He made their cause His own and declared Himself one with them. He gave them the same right to demand hospitality and a hearing for their message as He had received from the Father who sent Him. He conferred on them the same power to bring blessings and salvation; for "he that receiveth you, receiveth me."

But what did they secure that received Him? It is true that though He had to some extent shown Himself in His divine greatness, He still stood before His Apostles and before the world as a mortal man, subject to pain

and suffering. Therefore, He continued: "He that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." Who that was, they knew full well from His oft-repeated declarations. It was the Father in Heaven, the great God, the Lord of Heaven and earth.

This, then, is the dignity which Christ conferred on the Twelve and on all those who succeed them, the right to demand a kind reception and a willing hearing in the name of Christ and in the name of God. Their demands are God's demands; their blessings are God's blessings. Therefore St. Paul says: "For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us" (2 Cor. 5,20).

Applications. 1) Here we learn how we are to accept and receive the ministrations of the priest, whether we be laymen or priests. In receiving absolution, his blessing, his admonition, we must look beyond the human person and find the Savior.

2) In our priestly work we ought always to keep before our mind the truth that Christ is working in and through us as His humble instruments. Will it not be very appropriate at times to ask ourselves how Christ would perform this or that function, celebrate mass, give communion, hear confessions, anoint, bless, instruct, admonish?

3) What a light do not these few words throw on the character of the Savior! What kindness and confidence

does He not show in so freely and generously giving His powers to frail human beings! What human authority would go so far? Men in authority would hesitate to entrust a hundred thousand persons with such large powers for fear of mistakes and abuses, and at times from fear for their own authority. Certainly, there is a great difference between a mere human superior and Christ. The former cannot be with all his representatives at all times, whereas Christ is with His representatives always and can guide them every single moment. But in spite of this continual presence, mistakes and abuses occur; yet Christ tolerates them rather than deprive the world of the blessing of having everywhere men endowed with His powers. Here we have an illustration of the disinterestedness with which the Savior always considers first not His own dignity, but the good of the faithful.

II. THE NEW FAMILY OF GOD. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of [because he is] a prophet, shall receive the reward of a prophet; and he that receiveth a just man in the name of a just man, shall receive the reward of a just man. And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple . . . shall not lose his reward." Until the coming of Christ it was one of the curses of original sin that man was self-centred. He referred everything to himself as the last end and, therefore, practiced kindness only towards those who, either by the ties of blood or friendship, were

one with him. This "clannishness," however, did not counteract to any great extent the division and dissension which rent mankind in consequence of men no longer being God-centred.

The great task of Christ and His Apostles consisted in again making God the centre of the world, of human society, of the individual. The new, supernatural order elevates men to the dignity of children of God, and establishes one great family on earth, with the Father in Heaven as the source of union and love. In every family the bond of union and love is the identity of blood, of the source of life, and of mutual need and advantage based upon this blood-relationship; its members must help one another. In the family of God, we have the identity of sanctifying grace, to which is added mutual need and advantage both in the natural and in the supernatural order. The members of this society are men of flesh and blood, who have needs for their human existence as well as for their supernatural life. But the motives urging men to supply those needs spring from their supernatural relationship to God and to one another. Christ expresses them by saying: "in the name of (or, for the sake of the needy person being) a prophet, a just man, one of these little ones."

By a prophet He understands one who preaches His doctrine and guides people on the road to Heaven; by a just man, one who leads a saintly life and is a true servant of God; and as He mentions "these little ones," He points to His Apostles. The words here quoted by St. Matthew find their interpretation in St. Mark: "For

whosoever shall give you to drink a cup of water in my name, because you belong to Christ: amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9,40).

Therefore, Christ promises His reward for every action by which life is promoted in the Church, provided one renders assistance from a motive furnished by the relation the needy person bears to God, and that reward partakes of the nature of the reward which the person assisted will receive. He who extends hospitality to a "prophet" because he is "a prophet," thereby renders the exercise of the vocation God has given the latter easier or even possible to him; therefore, he will share with the prophet the reward of his work in the service of God. Thus both the prophet and he who takes care of him are helped. He who exercises kindness towards a saintly person because he is a friend and true servant of God, encourages the saint, and, in serving a friend of God, renders a service of friendship to God Himself. Therefore, God will treat him as a friend and reward him like the saint. Thus again, both he and the just man derive a benefit from the act of kindness. He who renders the least service, and were it only giving a cup of cold water to slake the thirst, to a disciple of Christ, who possibly has no other recommendation, serves Christ Himself, who is one with His disciple. Christ and God the Father, who sent Him, will not forget it; "he shall not lose his reward." Thus the Lord knows how to take care of His Apostles and at the same time how to render His graces accessible to all men for the increase of His Kingdom.

Applications. 1) Let us gratefully admire and praise the wisdom and kindness of God, which shines forth in the establishment of the great family and the means He adopts to foster the true family spirit, which the words of the Savior describe. Let us learn the lesson that if we wish to promote union and concord, or re-establish it where it is lost, we must try to make men God-centred.

2) One great purpose the Savior had in this latter part of His pastoral instruction, was to reassure the Apostles amidst the persecutions and trials which He had foretold in the former part. An apostle can always devote himself to his vocation with the greatest confidence, even if this work prevents him from looking after his temporal needs. Christ, by His promises, moves the people to render His representatives the services they need for the support of their temporal existence. His Church is like the great household of a well-ordered family, in which every one has his particular occupation and every one works for the benefit of all. God directs this household and sees to it that nobody starves.

3) In the Church of God, nobody need be jealous of another's position; for everybody, even by the smallest and most insignificant help, can promote the great cause of God and thus secure a reward that corresponds to the most important service. The poor widow who with her few pennies and devout prayers assists the bishop and his priests in the work of the diocese, can secure a reward which is as great as that of those who earnestly and

successfully labor in the apostolate. The child who gives the dime he received for buying some sweet-meats, to the missionary in pagan lands, is rewarded like the missionary himself. For the motive, which is the source of all good works and gives them their value, is accessible to all: love of God and love of our neighbor for the sake of God. After all, it is not the external work, but the motive which prompts it, that God rewards.

4) How important it is for priests and teachers to direct the thoughts of people to this motive and instruct them how the Lord, who rewards even a cup of water given to a disciple, will remunerate them, and how the Savior must and does assume the debt of gratitude which we owe them for the support they give us!

5) The truth which the Savior develops in these lines must make us humble and move us to admire the kindness of God, who, whilst He has instituted a hierarchical order in His Church, nevertheless gives everybody a chance to take part in the greatest of all human activities, the salvation of souls.

III. GOD IN ALL. "Amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." The Savior is evidently at pains to inculcate the truth that the reward for assisting in the work of saving souls is absolutely certain. The reward which He promises need not be understood to consist exclusively in blessings to be enjoyed in Heaven. Nevertheless, they are the most important element. We should miss an

essential element in Christ's words were we not to see in the rewards of a prophet, a just man and a disciple of Christ, gifts which cannot be lost: God and heavenly treasures. Only thus is God really placed in the centre, out of which, according to what was said before, self is to be removed. As we stated in the foregoing paragraphs, Christ came on earth to do away with the selfishness and the earth-bound evil tendencies which dominated man since the fall in Paradise, and to make us God-bound and Heaven-bound again. Moreover, every other recompense can be lost, can be taken away from us by the malice of men and the disfavor of circumstances; but nobody can rob us of God and heavenly treasures. They alone are that "incorruptible crown" of which St. Paul speaks (1 Cor. 9,25).

Applications. 1) We see how the Savior from the very foundation of His Church has before His mind the great objective for which it is to be established: "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in us all" (Eph. 4, 6). For our task here on earth consists in striving amidst difficulties, and of our own free volition, for that which will be a blessed necessity in Heaven and the essence of our happiness: "God above all and in us all." It is said and rightly so, that our spiritual life becomes simpler the longer we have been leading it. The reason is that we learn and become more and more accustomed to seek God above all and through all. This, then, must be our principal endeavor. We cannot constantly add to our practices and good works, but

we can constantly purify our intention and try to seek God, work and suffer for God, and do His will more perfectly.

2) Christ's Kingdom on earth will always remain "the Church militant," contending against external foes and the innate weakness of its members; and our life will never cease to be a warfare against the suggestions of the evil one and the faulty inclinations of our nature. This is the reason why Christ says that He came to bring the sword. Nevertheless, the first salutation of the Apostles sent out on their mission is to be: "Peace to you!" Christ does not want war for the sake of war, but for the sake of peace. While the perfect realization of this peace lies beyond, nevertheless we must keep this blessed end constantly in view. There are serious and depressing elements enough in human life. Why not follow the hint of the Master and console ourselves with the great prospect before us? We think too rarely of our happy eternity. The thought about it and the calm which follows every victory gained over our passions and the assaults of the devil, are a part of the peace which the Savior came to establish on earth.

COLLOQUY. Thank the Lord for the lesson He has given you, for the peace you can obtain by carrying it out, for the fraternal charity He promotes by it, for the elevation of mind and heart He offers you. Pray for the grace of proper detachment, for never-failing loyalty to your Leader, for purity of intention, for cour-

age in your life-long battle, for a better understanding of the "wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. But as is written: that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2,7–9).

Meditation 13

ISRAEL AND THE GOSPEL

(Matt. 11,1)

"And it came to pass: when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he passed from thence, to teach and preach in their cities."

In these words the Evangelist sums up the efforts Jesus made to win Israel, before He found Himself compelled to separate His Apostles from the bulk of the nation and to withdraw, to a certain extent, from the people who stubbornly rejected His message. After instructing the Twelve on the manner in which they were to fulfill their mission, not only now, but after His Ascension, He for a while scattered them through the cities of Galilee, that they might try to gain a hearing

for His Gospel; but at the same time He continued His own work.

As we have come to the end of a division in the first gospel, it will be proper to review in their entirety the details we have considered in the foregoing meditations.

The sacred author, in the section just finished, develops two points. First, he shows how Christ, from true pity and with consideration for the prejudiced Jews, did everything to win them. Then he tells his hearers how the Lord predicted the persecutions which the Twelve and all His adherents would have to suffer in the future, and the punishments which would be inflicted on those who reject the Savior's message, how He formulated stern demands of loyalty even unto death, and described the rewards awaiting His loyal followers, and thus He intentionally sketches the fate that awaits Israel and the Gospel.

Let us ask for the grace of always faithfully following the call of God.

1. INTENSIFIED EFFORTS. "And it came to pass: when Jesus had made an end of commanding [giving instructions to] his twelve disciples, he passed from thence, to teach [give private instructions and make personal appeals] and preach [address larger audiences and speak in public] in their cities." It would seem that the Lord had interrupted His usual work and tarried for some days in the place where He had drawn the attention of the Twelve to the spiritual misery of the people, devoting this time exclusively to giving norms and instruc-

tions to the Apostles concerning the work they were to do. Now they were scattered for a while, according to His behest, all over Galilee, making public appeals and also a house-to-house canvass, trying to win at least the common people of Galilee for the Gospel, and to counteract the evil effects which the calumny of the Pharisees, that Christ worked His miracles by the aid of the devil, had produced. The Master Himself did not remain idle during this time, but worked with the same diligence as before, giving public addresses and speaking to individuals in private. It was a last and supreme effort to avert the calamity of His having to establish a sharp line of demarcation and division between His disciples and the Galileans and seeing Himself compelled to become sparing in His instructions and miracles. If this effort failed, He had to choose a policy, the aim of which, at least as far as the Galileans were concerned, was rather to diminish the responsibility and guilt of Israel than to offer them the graces of Redemption.

And yet, Christ knew all the time that even this effort would end in failure, at least so far as the bulk of the people were concerned. Why then, we may reverently ask, did He make the attempt? His manner of procedure was the same as that which God as a rule pursues in working out man's salvation. For though He knows from all eternity who will save himself by his own free choice, He acts as though this were unknown to Him. But one might respectfully ask why the kind and holy God pursues a plan which not only increases the merits and the glory of the just, but adds to the guilt and the

responsibility of the sinner. A complete explanation of this mystery will probably never be found by us as long as we live on earth. Its complete solution and its full justification seems to have been reserved for the day of the universal judgment. God demands of us a faith strong enough to believe that He is kind, holy, just, and wise in all He does, and humbly to confess our inability of solving the mysteries of Providence and to realize that the ways of the Infinite Majesty are too exalted to be fully understood by our weak, finite mind. Nevertheless, we can offer some considerations at least for a partial solution of the difficulty.

It is certain that those Galileans who turned a deaf ear to Christ and His Apostles, did so of their own free will, and that every mitigating circumstance, lessening the degree of responsibility for their sin, received ample consideration in determining the penalty of their fault. Moreover, we may say with good reason that the combined efforts of the Lord and His Apostles, while meagre in immediate results, in the case of quite a number of these people served as a remote preparation for receiving the Gospel later on. Yet we must not overlook the fact that when, some thirty years later, the Romans, by divine direction, inflicted on the Jewish nation the punishment for having rejected the Messias, Galilee was the first to suffer.

Christ, in making this last, but fruitless effort, undoubtedly intended to give the entire world an object lesson concerning three important truths. This intensified attempt shows clearly that God wants to save all

men, even those who are as stubborn and conceited as the Israelites, and that if one is lost, he goes to ruin in spite of many graces offered to him. The sad fate of the Galileans, moreover, furnishes a terrible illustration of the danger which lies in yielding, in matters of soul and religion, to passion, preconceived notions, and prejudices; for it was passion and prejudice that rendered them deaf to the pleadings of the Savior and brought about their ruin. And thirdly, we find here a most serious object lesson about the power of the free will, which is able to resist appeals and graces as powerful as were the favors offered to the Galileans. These are three truths which must be brought home to us human beings not only by the word of the infallible Master, but by exemplifications which strike the mind with irresistible force.

Application. We are here confronted with a mystery of Divine Providence which we must humbly adore. St. Paul, referring to it in the Epistle to the Romans, exclaims: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways" (Rom. 11, 33). Let us beware of the spirit of Calvinism and Jansenism, which exploited this mystery to drive men into a false and unbearable rigorism and fatalism. Faith teaches us that God is infinitely kind as well as infinitely just. We shall never be able, while here on earth, to find the manner in which these two attributes are harmonized in the divine nature. Let us humbly acknowledge

this, and, on our part, let us foster great confidence in His kindness as well as a childlike fear of His justice, being careful to avoid every deliberate sin, but never to lose courage and confidence after a fall.

II. CHRIST'S MERCIFUL CARE. We remarked at the beginning of this volume that, in this part of the first gospel, the personality of the Savior stands out very prominently. Among the characteristics of Christ we notice His sincerity and honesty. He prophesies to the Twelve in words which, in point of clearness, leave nothing to be desired, what they have to expect as members and messengers of His Kingdom. We admire also the firmness with which He demands detachment even from the nearest relatives. What majesty lies in the words: "He that loveth father and mother, son and daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me." What power does He claim, when He asserts that eternal happiness depends on being acknowledged by Him as one of His own, and eternal damnation on His disowning one. But it is coupled with great humility. As man, He is not the Lord of the harvest, and, therefore, tells His Apostles to pray to "the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest."

But the virtue which shines forth most brilliantly is the charity He manifests towards the headstrong, conceited, worldly-minded Israelites. He sincerely pities them and wants to help them at all costs. But alas! word has gone forth from the leaders of the nation that He is not only an unholy man, but in league with the devil.

This blasphemous calumny renders fruitless His personal efforts with many. Therefore, while He devotes His attention to those who are willing to listen to Him, He sends His Apostles to counteract the evil influence and to dispel the suspicion where it has taken root. But He first gives them minute directions, so that they may carefully avoid whatever may offend the Galileans. Hence, He restricts their work to persons of their own nation in order not to hurt the latter's false nationalistic pride. Hence, also, He insists on disinterestedness, telling them to give all their services gratuitously, to be careful in the choice of their hosts, and to avoid visits and conversations which only gratify their pride or sense of comfort.

At the same time He puts in the foreground all that is apt to win the people. He sends them men of their own extraction and their equals in social position. He endows His messengers with the power of working miracles equal to His own, and exhorts them to use that power freely. He bids them make their preaching a message of peace and salvation, and to introduce themselves with words of benediction, kindly spoken and conveying heavenly graces.

Even the seriousness they are to show, the significant ceremony of shaking the dust off their feet in case their efforts prove unavailing, are but the last and almost desperate means to save the people. For, while that action would fail of its purpose with sophisticated men of the higher walks in life, it is apt to make an impression on the simple persons of the working classes.

Thus the Savior is really the Good Shepherd, going in search of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That phrase, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," affords us a deep glance into the Sacred Heart. It shows us the love and pity which Jesus feels for the misguided Galileans. Though their spiritual misery is to a great extent their own fault, He excuses them as much as possible, and thinks only of their lack of protection and guidance, their spiritual exhaustion. Far from uttering words of blame and castigation and treating them harshly, He is ready to undertake long and weary wanderings through the desert, unmindful of the thorns which will wound Him in His endeavor to extricate the sheep and to carry them on His own shoulders to the fold, where they will be safe and find food and proper care for their wounds.

Applications. 1) Such then is the Master whom we have the privilege to serve. Have we not in the past received similar kindness, when we wandered away from the right path? Let us completely surrender ourselves and all our interests to His love, His tactfulness, His wisdom, His disinterestedness, and try to belong to Him alone, live for Him alone, serve Him alone in our holy vocation.

2) Christ is also our exemplar in the work we have to do for souls. He addressed the admonitions to pity and active help, not only to the Twelve, but likewise to all His laborers. Our dealings with men must be a pru-

dent mixture of kindness and severity. But kindness has the priority. We must make all reasonable concessions to the faults and prejudices of men. Only when all means of sympathetic charity have been exhausted, may we have recourse to a holy and prudent severity. But even this severity must be inspired by charity, and we must be particularly careful not to use severity from a motive of personal resentment, which easily creeps in when our best efforts fail.

III. ISRAEL'S REFUSAL. A. A SERIOUS LESSON. Knowing the care with which St. Matthew selected every item for his gospel, and omitted every detail which did not bear directly on the point he wished to make, we may ask, what purpose had he in view when he inserted here, not only the account of the choice of the Apostles, but also the instruction Christ gave them on this occasion, and the predictions which He made concerning the treatment they and their followers would meet with later on.

This entire section in itself is a powerful warning for all the readers of the first gospel, whether Jew or Gentile, against yielding to passion and prejudice in matters of religion. It was ominous enough that Christ had to make such concessions to the Galileans in delivering to them a message which they ought to have accepted with the utmost eagerness. It was still more ominous that He had to predict, even before He sent men out on an apostolic mission, the hard and bitter treatment which was in store for them. Neither their sacred calling, nor their nationality, nor even the tenderest ties of human

nature, would be able to protect them, much less secure a favorable hearing for them. Their innocence would not save them in the courts of human justice; their charity, enforced by miracles, would not secure them against deadly hatred and malice. Why not? Because the doctrine they preached and practiced, militated against the worldly ambition and carnal aspirations which the Israelites read into the prophecies of the Old Testament; in other words, merely because the Israelites deified themselves by making Yahweh their divine servant, instead of acknowledging themselves as God's chosen servants.

But this stubborn resistance to God's grace was not to go unpunished. "It shall be more tolerable to the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city." The Hebrew readers of the first gospel could see the verification of Christ's prophecy concerning the treatment of His messengers and followers, more than a decade before His prediction concerning the punishment of those who would refuse to accept the message came true. This fact should have set them thinking about the fulfilment of His prophecies concerning the fate of those who rejected the Gospel of Christ and persecuted its preachers. St. Matthew, therefore, intended in this section to give his readers a solemn warning and a serious lesson. If they had only heeded it!

Applications. 1) Here we have another illustration of the latitude God gives to the free will of man. Man is able deliberately to resist the most powerful warn-

ings of grace. His fate is entirely in his own hands. He is saved because he wills to be saved; he is condemned because he chooses eternal ruin. They say that St. Philip Neri prayed every day that God might protect him against his own wicked free will. Only one thing will save us from the abuse of our free will, and that is absolute and unconditional surrender to God's will, coupled with the firm resolution to overcome ourselves, our passions, and our prejudices at all costs.

2) The Evangelist's manner of treatment is a psychological masterpiece. He must announce to his Hebrew readers a fate and promulgate truths which are diametrically opposed to their favorite false notion of their privileged position as God's chosen people. Were he to announce these to them in his own words, it would be *a priori* certain that he would only arouse their deepest resentment. But when he makes the Master speak, the truth of whose words has been proven by the visible fulfilment of many prophecies, not the least among them being His prediction concerning the treatment of His representatives, there is at least hope that some of the readers will consider the warning. It will be very wise on our part if we follow St. Matthew's example in similar circumstances.

B. FORE-WARNED, FORE-ARMED. The fate which awaited the messengers and followers of Christ was in itself a disappointing and dangerous outlook for them. Even today, in spite of the fact that history for the past nineteen centuries confirms Christ's predictions, not a

few of His followers find it difficult to reconcile themselves to this fate, but live in the hope that God will spare them those trials and persecutions that are the very proof of the true Church of Christ. This temptation, in the case of the Apostles, received additional force from the passionate love which they, in common with all Israelites, entertained for their nation. Years later even St. Paul felt constrained to voice deep sorrow at the sight of his nation's infidelity and impending fate (Rom. ch. 9). This terrible disappointment was apt to imperil the faith of the Apostles and dampen their enthusiasm. Therefore, Christ had to warn them beforehand, and not only once, but repeatedly. He had to impress them deeply with the truth that the worst kind of persecution would be inseparably connected with their work. Thus fore-warned, they would be fore-armed; and, seeing in their sad experiences the fulfilment of the Master's words, instead of being weakened, they would be strengthened in their faith.

Moreover, if they had to meet these persecutions without special directions as to their conduct, they would be liable to make serious tactical mistakes. For the situation would appear so unnatural to the human mind that only the wisdom of God could enable them to meet it in the proper manner. Their spiritual progress and the welfare of the Church compelled the Savior to be quite outspoken about this point at the very beginning of their apostolic career.

Consequently, He let them know the whole truth. But note the manner in which He did so. While outspoken

and serious, He nevertheless treated the subject in an encouraging way, without a trace of the un-Christian rigorism of the Jansenists. He demanded great sacrifices, but He also explained their necessity and the blessings which would follow from them. He did not exaggerate. He encouraged the Apostles with the promise of a special divine assistance and a special reward. "Better are you than many sparrows." "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of the Father that speaketh in you." "I will confess him before my Father who is in Heaven."

Applications. 1) The care and foresight which we here see Jesus exercising in behalf of His Apostles should fill us with great confidence.

2) There are two ways of proposing the religious truths to people—one austere, repulsive, discouraging; the other gentle, inviting, elevating. The former multiplies sins and makes duties unnecessarily onerous; the latter multiplies good acts and renders obligations reasonably easy. Which will we choose both for ourselves and others, if we desire to have the spirit of Christ?

COLLOQUY. Thank Christ for all the love and consideration He has shown you in drawing you to Himself. Offer yourself without reserve for His service. Pray that you may never abuse your God-given free will for your own ruin. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6,69).

Part II

CHRIST'S EXPERIENCES

Meditation 14

THE BAPTIST'S QUESTION

(Matt. 11,2–6)

"Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples he said to him: Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another? And Jesus making answer said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me."

Before the Evangelist describes the failure of Christ's new effort to win the hearts of the Galileans, he narrates the last attempt made by John the Baptist to convert Israel to its Messias. John sent a delegation of his disciples to interrogate the Savior in the name of the last and greatest prophet, whether He was the expected Messias. Jesus, for good reasons, answered by merely referring to His miracles which, according to the prophecies, proved Him to be the Christ. He added a solemn warning for those who were being misled by

their preconceived notions. A few commentators, following the explanation of Tertullian, opine that the Baptist had the question put to Jesus because he was tempted to doubt Christ's dignity. But this interpretation is emphatically rejected by the Fathers of the Church and the vast majority of Catholic commentators, and cannot be harmonized with the character of the Baptist and his previous history.

Let us ask for the grace never to be scandalized by Christ's cross.

I. THE QUESTION. "Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples he said to him: Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?" What the Evangelist narrates in this pericope, occurred before the Apostles were sent out on their first mission. St. Luke, following the chronological order, places quite a number of facts between this embassy and all the events and instructions of Christ we have considered so far in this volume. The purpose of St. Matthew in thus inverting the order of events will become clear in the sequel.

A. WHAT INSPIRED THE QUESTION. St. Matthew with his accustomed brevity merely says: "When John had heard the works of Christ." From St. Luke we learn that precisely at this time the Savior performed many striking miracles—chief among which was the resuscitation of the widow's son at Naim—and that the report of these extraordinary deeds spread far and wide. The disciples of the Baptist, who were permitted to visit

him in his dungeon at Machaerus, kept their master informed about these miracles, about the turn Christ's cause was taking and the scanty results He was achieving. Even the very disciples who remained faithful to John, could not be persuaded to become adherents of Christ; nay, as the gospels seem to indicate, they refused to believe in His Messianic dignity.

It is a fact that the Savior for good reasons never publicly stated in so many words that He was the Messias, though He at times did so in private, for instance, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4, 25–26).

But the holy Baptist was no doubt deeply pained at the general attitude of the people towards Christ and probably asked himself the question why the Lord was so silent about His dignity, and whether He awaited the proper opportunity to declare Himself. St. John very probably understood that it was the duty of the High Council to put to Christ the momentous question whether He was the Messias. When he himself began to preach, the Sanhedrin very soon sent their delegates to him to interrogate him about his dignity and mission (John 1, 19ff.). At that time they complied with the obligation of their office. But now they not only neglected it, but showed a consistent and open hostility against Jesus. Moreover, was John not the chosen Precursor of Christ, and as such had he not the right and duty to give Jesus an opportunity of stating openly who He was?

Therefore, he resolved that the momentous question whether Jesus was the expected Messias, should be put

to Him not only openly and solemnly, but officially by a man whom the people revered as a prophet; and that since he could not go in person, he would send some of his disciples, who were to ask in his name. According to St. Luke the envoys said: "John the Baptist hath sent us to thee, saying: Art thou he that art to come; or look we for another?" The title "he that is to come" was one of the common appellations of the Messias, found in the prophecies (Gen. 9,10; Ezech. 21,27) and familiar to the Jews of that time (John 6,14).

Applications. 1) Let us admire the zeal and unselfishness of the great Precursor. Even when languishing in his subterranean dungeon, he tried to fulfill his office. When abandoned by all except a few faithful disciples, he thought only of their spiritual interest and the cause of Christ, and wished these last friends of his to transfer their loyalty to the Savior. A truly great soul and a model for us.

2) How frequently have we, like the imprisoned Baptist, to take upon ourselves the task of indifferent and worldly-minded or erring souls. We must take their place when they neglect Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, forget their duty to pray or to atone for their sins, fail to look after the education of their children, and neglect their own souls.

B. THE QUESTION. The Baptist formulated the interrogation most psychologically: "Art thou he that art

to come?" All Israel, except the worldly-minded Sadducees, who hobnobbed with the Romans, was at this time awaiting with great anxiety the coming of the Messias. John had been suspected of being the Christ, or at least Elias, the falsely supposed forerunner of His first advent, but he had told everybody that they must look for another. Jesus could not tell them that they had to look for another.

John, moreover, made it known that he wished to be enlightened by Jesus, and thereby professed his readiness to rely on His word. He wanted to give His wavering disciples and the multitudes an example of the confidence they were to place in Christ's word, and how completely they should surrender themselves and their dearest interests to Him, no matter what the all-powerful High Council and the Pharisees said and did. This was the Baptist's last sermon to Israel, and with this act he took leave of his nation and his sacred office. Soon Herod was to sacrifice his head to the lust and revenge of an adulteress.

Application. Was not this a most fitting close of the Baptist's career? God grant that the last act of our mortal career may be a profession of trust, loyalty and love to our Savior. But it will be such only if our life-course has been one of unwavering trust, loyalty and love. These virtues we preach to others; let us, to even a greater degree, practice them ourselves.

II. CHRIST'S ANSWER. "And Jesus making answer said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and

seen. [The Greek text has: "what you are hearing and seeing."] The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them." In His reply, the Savior combined prudence, modesty, and tact with respect for the zealous Precursor. Though for weighty reasons He could not answer the question with that straightforwardness which the other desired, it was clear enough for any one of good will who paused to reflect. Though it may seem somewhat obscure to those who are not sufficiently acquainted with the writings of the Old Testament, for the Jews and under the actual conditions under which it was given, Christ's reply was intelligible and plain enough.

St. Luke tells us: "In that same hour he [Jesus] cured many of their diseases and hurts, and evil spirits: and to many that were blind he gave sight" (Luke 7, 21). Christ had taken care that the envoys should arrive at a time when He was multiplying precisely those miracles which had been foretold by Isaias as a sign of the Messias (61,1). But He would neither then nor at a future date make the simple assertion that He was the Messias. While His great modesty and humility may have played a part in imposing this silence on Him, the chief reason lay in the Israelites themselves. For, first of all He was not the Messias in the sense which they attributed to the title. And secondly, if He made that assertion, the unavoidable consequence would have been the spreading of rebellion against the Roman rulers through the length and breadth of Palestine. It was no

idle fancy on the part of the High Council when shortly before Christ's solemn entry into Jerusalem they said: "What do we, for this man doth many miracles? If we let him alone, all will believe him; and the Romans will come, and take away our place and nation" (John 11, 47.48). The history of the pseudo-messiases after Christ's Ascension furnishes ample proof for this.

Nevertheless, the Savior's answer was amply sufficient. For the Israelites had been admonished frequently enough to watch for the signs which would prove the true Messias, and the words in which Jesus couched His reply are almost literally taken from Isaias (35,5–6; 61, 1). The conclusion, therefore, was obvious to any one who gave this question the earnest consideration and attention which it deserved. So, the real meaning of Christ's answer was: "Go and tell John that the prophecies of Isaias are fulfilled in Me."

Christ did more than merely reply to the question of the Baptist. The prophecy of Isaias, which He quoted, began with the words: "God himself will come and save you." Therefore, in addition to professing Himself the promised Redeemer, He proclaimed His divinity. Moreover, by working numerous miracles precisely at the time when the envoys approached Him, He not only made a verbal answer, but gave a striking proof of His dignity by visible deeds.

Applications. 1) Let us admire the modesty, tact, and prudence of our Savior. We have here again a chance to study His wonderful mind and heart. He always

shows the most delicate regard for men, even for the Israelites, who have never accorded Him the smallest degree of consideration. We have here also a lesson in pastoral prudence. How careful He is to avoid everything that may do spiritual harm to souls.

2) Let us imitate this modesty of Jesus. He never boasted. In this age of self-exaltation and publicity-seeking, let us avoid the slightest tendency to boast. How much virtue is spoiled, how much merit lost, how much purgatory incurred by this habit. "Love to remain unknown and to be considered as naught," says the Imitation of Christ. Progress in spiritual life and in our efforts for the salvation of others does not depend on advertising ourselves. Such advertising belongs to secular business.

III. A WARNING. "And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me." In these words we find the purpose for which St. Matthew abandons the chronological order and puts the incident here. The Baptist did not need the warning which Jesus added to His reply; but for the Baptist's disciples and the people who were present, it was very necessary. The words in which the Savior couched this warning were taken from the same prophet Isaias, to whom He had referred in His answer. Isaias used them when Achaz, the king of Juda, and his people were threatened by the combined armies of Rasin, king of Syria, and Phacee, king of Israel, and God commanded the prophet to tell the people not to fear, since Jerusalem

would not be taken by the enemy. Achaz and his people did not believe the man of God and, when bidden to ask for a reassuring sign, they refused to do so under a plea of false piety, but preferred to enter into negotiations with Rasin and Phacee. Thereupon Isaias told them: "The Lord shall be for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to the two houses of Israel and for a snare and a ruin to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Is. 8,14). The Greek word *"skandalon"* signifies a snare and also a stone against which one stumbles. As the people in the days of Isaias refused to understand the method by which God often chooses to attain His end—by means and ways which naturally seem to frustrate it—and thus brought ruin upon themselves, so now the disciples of John and the multitudes witnessing the scene, would cause their own downfall by refusing to recognize God's plan concerning the personal appearance and work of the Messias. The disciples of the Baptist took umbrage at Christ's not following the austere mode of life which their master and the Pharisees had chosen. The people would not accept the Lord as their Messias because His personal appearance, His doctrine and work, did not agree with their false notions.

Application. Christ's warning remains timely at all times. For us and the people of today it is the mystery of the cross which threatens to be a snare and a stumbling-block. Let us become more and more practically convinced that an apparent failure in God's work is the surest means of success; that sacrifices and trials are the

most reliable promise of the divine assistance; that self-denial is the only road to peace of mind, and that humiliations are the pledge of exaltation.

COLLOQUY. Acts of faith in the divinity of Christ and the mystery of the cross. Petition of pardon for the faults committed against humility and modesty, for patience and hope in desolation. Prayer for grace to act in accordance with the lessons received in this meditation. "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies and not to covetousness" (Ps. 118,36).

Meditation 15

THE BAPTIST IN ISRAEL

(Matt. 11, 7–15)

"And when they [the disciples of John] went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? a prophet? yea I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee. Amen I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than

he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come. He that hath ears [to hear], let him hear."

In this very eloquent passage Christ wishes to rouse the apathetic people to a realization of the graces He is offering them. For this purpose He extols the Baptist, both on account of his personal sanctity and of his exalted office, and reminds them of the pious sentiments which urged them to go out to seek John in the desert. He seriously warns them against their leaders, who try to rob them of the graces the Messias is bringing. The animated style and the bitter sarcasm employed in this text deserve special attention.

Let us ask for grace that we may always hear and follow the voice of God, no matter what the world thinks and does.

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE BAPTIST. We give a literal translation of the Greek text: "And when they [the disciples of the Baptist] went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What spectacle did you want to see when you went into the desert? How a cane-brake is shaken by the wind? Certainly not. What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, people who wear soft garments live in the houses of kings. Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yea, I tell you, one who is even more

than a prophet. For this is he of whom it has been written: Behold, I send my messenger ahead of thee, who shall prepare the way before thee. Of a truth I say to you, there has not been raised [by God] among men born of women a greater than John the Baptist. And yet, even one of inferior rank in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

A. JOHN'S DIGNITY. We must certainly be struck by Christ's words. Never before have we heard Him speak with such vehemence. In close succession He utters six forceful rhetorical questions, becomes very sarcastic, and winds up with a stern warning that if one is not stone-deaf, he ought to keep his ears open. But He is making an almost desperate attempt to arouse the timid and apathetic multitudes gathered around Him, to throw off their fear of the leaders, to reflect and act for themselves.

The solemn and official interrogation conducted by the envoys of the man whom they revere for his sanctity, is in danger of being passed over and forgotten as unimportant. The Baptist, in the days of his preaching at the Jordan, has succeeded in arousing for a while their religious sentiments. The recollection of those experiences and a sense of shame should wake them from their lethargy. Using bitter sarcasm—a rare thing with Him—Christ asks whether they made that toilsome journey from Galilee to the desert in Judea at the banks of the Jordan for the purpose of seeing a show, for the sake of witnessing the innumerable bows the cane-

brake on the banks of the river makes to every puff of wind. Without a further word, He proposes His second question, whether they made that difficult and long trip to see a man living in luxury and dressed according to the latest fashion, in other words, one who could not teach them anything worth knowing, and tells them that they should have gone to a royal palace for that kind of a man. The allusion to Herod, who is keeping John a prisoner in the dungeon under his palace, is obvious. Next He questions whether they went to see a prophet, and asserts that in John they have beheld a man who is more than a prophet, because he is the forerunner of the Messias.

Applications. 1) Let us make acts of atonement for the thoughtlessness and indifference which Christ meets here, and express our sorrow for faults we may have committed in this line. One way of atoning will consist in patiently bearing the thoughtlessness and indifference with which our efforts are met.

2) Our Lord can be severe. But when does He display severity? If we compare all cases mentioned in the gospels, we shall find that He is severe only when the fault He censures is concerned with the neglect of an important vocational duty; for instance, when Peter tries to persuade Him to refuse the cross sent Him by the Father, or, when the leaders of the Jewish nation influence the people to reject their Messias. Israel, which existed as a nation principally for the purpose of being

the first to accept the Messias and introducing Him to the other nations, was guilty of a fault of this kind. Thus this passage contains a serious warning for us to take the duties of our vocation very conscientiously.

3) While the example of Christ proves that the use of sarcasm is justifiable and even necessary at times, it shows also that it must be employed sparingly and cautiously.

B. THE DIGNITY OF A CHRISTIAN. "Amen I say to you, there hath not risen [has not been raised] among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist; yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Both in the Old and the New Testament a man is said to have been "raised," when he has been called by God to an especial dignity or given an important task, as, for instance, the prophets, David, Christ Himself. Jesus, therefore, asserts that John is the greatest of all men born under the Old Dispensation; but He does not wish to assert that He is the greatest man of all times. Hence the Baptist in the Roman Breviary is styled "the greatest of all the prophets." The reason lies in the fact that he mediates between the Old and the New Testament, putting an end to the Law and introducing the order of grace. He does not foretell the Savior's coming, but announces the fact of His having come, or, as the Breviary says, he points Him out with his finger, and he introduces Him into His office.

The entire context compels us to refer the terms "greater" and "lesser," which occur in the next sentence, not to personal sanctity, but to office and hierarchal rank. For otherwise we should be forced to maintain that a lower degree of supernatural holiness in a Christian is higher than a higher degree of the same supernatural holiness in the Baptist; consequently, that since the supernatural holiness in both is of the same nature, a lower degree is higher than a higher degree of the same kind; but this would be a contradiction in terms.

Therefore, the meaning of the comparison which Christ makes when He says: "Yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" amounts to this: membership and hierarchal rank in the Church of Christ is so much higher than membership and hierarchal rank in the Synagogue, that the lowest dignity in the Church is greater than the highest in the Old Testament. We can illustrate this statement by examples taken from the Church. A Catholic lay person can possess greater personal sanctity than a priest or a religious; a simple cleric can be personally holier than a bishop and, therefore, will enjoy a higher degree of essential beatitude in Heaven or the beatific vision; but the rank of the former here on earth is lower than that of the latter, and the former in Heaven will not be given that accidental and additional glory and joy which will be the portion of those placed in a higher rank of the hierarchal order. In the same manner the members of even the lowest rank in the Church possess a dignity which was denied the Baptist, and will enjoy in Heaven

a certain distinction which he will not share. This is the explanation most commonly given by commentators.

The intention of Christ in making this statement evidently was to stimulate the multitudes to an appreciation of the grace He offered them.

Application. How grateful must we be for having been called to the true Church and the higher states in it! Let us offer sincere thanks to God and promise Him that we will always try to appreciate the favor and to make the best use of it.

II. ISRAEL SPURNS THE OFFER. We translate from the Greek: "From the days of John the Baptist until this very moment the Kingdom of Heaven is violently suppressed and the men of brute force rob the people of it." The real meaning of the verse can be only this: "Ever since the Baptist began to announce the arrival of the Kingdom in God, the men who have the religious and civil power in their hands, have been and still are opposing that Kingdom, and using forceful measures to rob the nation of it." We have already seen how the Sanhedrin showed its hostility against the preacher in the desert, plotted with the Herodians to effect his imprisonment, and forced Christ out of Judea into Galilee (Vol. I, pp. 258ff.). We also have been told by the Evangelist how they discredited Jesus with the Galileans and finally went so far as to accuse Him of being in league with Beelzebub (Vol. II, pp. 339ff.). According to the fourth evangelist, the Sanhedrin about this time published a decree excluding from the Synagogue, i. e.,

excommunicating, every one who would follow Christ (John 9,22). In the sequel we shall hear how "the men of brute force" drove Christ out of Galilee into Perea, and out of Perea into concealment among the mountains of Ephrem, from which He went forth only to be crucified in Jerusalem.

But let us not misinterpret the intention which prompted the Savior to make this remark. Far from complaining of personal grievances, He only intended to warn the people not to let political and religious despots deprive them of the most precious grace ever offered a nation, but to brave the anger of their leaders and save their own souls. He did not name the violent oppressors, but everybody knew whom He meant.

Application. Are Christ's words not true in our own day? What about the concentrated attacks made upon the Christian dogma and still more on Christian morality? Not only the priests and religious, but the laity must make strong efforts not to be deprived of the heirloom of Christ, and to withstand the allurements of the passions and the seductions of the world. Only those who fight and do violence to their lower nature, to their sense of comfort, their ambition, their human respect, are not robbed and vanquished. Thus, the meaning often given to this verse by ascetics, while not a correct interpretation of the words, is nevertheless a logical consequence. Let us make acts of sorrow and atonement for all the attacks made on the doctrine of Christ and His Church, and promise to fight the good fight.

III. JOHN IS ELIAS. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John: and if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come. He that hath ears [to hear] let him hear." A broader translation of these verses would be this: "All the prophets and the law [of Moses] spoke of the Messias as coming in the future. The time of making predictions about Him was ended when John appeared. For if you want to have the truth stated in ideas familiar to you, he is the Elias who, according to your notions, is to come immediately before the Messias. All the divine messengers who were sent to Israel before the Baptist, and whose words are recorded in the books of Moses [the law] and the books of the prophets, could only make predictions about the coming of the Messias because in their day it was still an event of the future. But the time for prophesying ceased when John began to preach. His appearance proves that the Messias dwells among His people, because he is the precursor foretold by the Scriptures. Therefore, everybody who is able to hear, ought to mind this and draw the logical conclusion."

The Savior called John "Elias that is to come." The Jews believed that the great Elias, who prophesied in the reign of King Achaz, would re-appear in the days of the Messias, and act as the precursor spoken of by the prophet Malachi. Jesus did not deem it advisable to correct their erroneous notion at this time. He very probably would only have caused confusion by giving them at this juncture the correct doctrine about His first and second advent and the two different forerun-

ners preceding them. He, therefore, adapted His words to their notions, but hinted at their mistake by saying: "If you want to express it that way, he is the Elias that is to come."

Several reasons justified His expressing Himself in this manner. The two precursors have very much in common as to character, mode of living, and the tasks imposed on them. Moreover, the name "Elias," which means "Yahweh is God," fitly expresses their personality and work, and it is not unusual for the Scriptures to employ a personal name to designate the office or character of some one. Does not Raphael tell Tobias: "I am Azarias the son of the great Ananias?" (Tob. 5,18). Azarias means "help of God" and "Ananias," "grace of God": Raphael was the help God sent the young traveler, and the archangel is the creature of the grace of God.

But, while making a concession to an error which could be excused by the obscurity of the prophecy concerning the person of the forerunner, the Savior did not fail to point out to His audience the duty of drawing the necessary conclusion concerning His own dignity and their obligation, and to warn them that each had to decide his own fate.

Applications. 1) Let us make an act of faith in the Messianic dignity of Christ, and then realize the duty which we have of not only listening to the suggestions and directions God gives us, partly by interior inspiration, partly by means of those placed over us, but of

drawing practical conclusions from them. A faithful servant does not need detailed instructions for everything; he uses his own reason and applies the general directions and suggestions of his master.

2) All the sophistry of the world and of those infected by its spirit, must not lead us astray. Canonical and religious obedience do not mean that we are to do only what we believe to be the most prudent and practical thing, judged from a worldly or purely natural point of view, but that we are to do the will of God as made known to us by His representatives. Here, too, Christ's warning applies: "Let him who hath ears, listen." Above all does it apply when "the mighty ones," those mighty in criticisms and murmurings, in lax views and worldly ways, try to rob us of the graces connected with fidelity to duty.

3) We can hardly doubt that the Savior could have made faith easier for the Galileans by being more explicit, instead of proposing the truth to them in a manner which, while sufficient, demanded hard thinking and good will. But faith is a virtue, and, therefore, needs the work of the free will or, as the theologians call it, the pious disposition to believe God. This pious frame of mind, besides the proper submission of our weak and limited intellect to the infinite divine mind, demands a careful and appreciative pondering over what we may call hints thrown out by God. We too must "seek God," "find Him," as St. Paul say (Acts

18,27), for the purpose of gaining a deeper knowledge of Him, and discovering what His will and pleasure is with regard to us. We must reflect and investigate to find our vocation, to know what He wants of us concerning our own spiritual progress, our work and the welfare of others. The so-called progress of dogma, so clearly noticeable in the history of the Church, depends on this same pious disposition.

COLLOQUY. Thank Christ for guiding your mind to a deeper and more intelligent faith, and promise to follow His guidance. Resolve to gain a more thorough knowledge of revelation in general, and of true Christian asceticism in particular. "Increase our faith" (Luke 7,5). "I do believe, Lord: help my unbelief" (Mark 9, 23).

Meditation 16

CHRIST AND THE BAPTIST

(Matt. 11,16–19)

"But whereunto shall I esteem this generation to be like? It is like to children sitting in the market place, who crying to their companions say: We have piped to you, and you have not danced: we have lamented, and you have not mourned. For John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say: He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton

and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified by her children."

Our Lord in this passage characterizes the attitude of the Jews against the Baptist and Himself as the result of a perverse and evil mind, and predicts that the plan of divine wisdom for the redemption of Israel and the world, which they reject as unacceptable, will be justified before the whole world.

Let us entreat the grace of willingly entering upon God's plan.

1. ISRAEL'S PERVERSITY. "But whereunto shall I esteem this generation to be like? It is like to children sitting in the market place, who crying to their companions say: We have piped to you and you have not danced: We have lamented, and you have not mourned." Christ continues the stinging rebuke which He began to administer to Israel in the preceding verses. The passage, even more than the preceding lines, shows a holy irritation, very unusual in the kind and forbearing Savior. Whilst before He had charged the people with sinful apathy, and the leaders with despotic infidelity, He now mercilessly lays bare the despicable vileness of their conduct. As though He were at a loss how properly to characterize their behavior towards Him and His forerunner, He exclaims: "What comparison can I find for these people?" They remind Him of a troop of fighting youngsters, squabbling with much noise in the market place. They are like perverse, contrary boys,

who "spoil all the fun" of their companions and refuse to take part in any play the latter propose. Children in those days, as now, liked to imitate in their pastimes the public performances of their elders. The boys of Palestine would imitate the dances of the adults, some taking the part of the musicians, others that of the dancers; at other times they would enact a funeral procession, and some would take the part of the "minstrels" singing dirges, while the others acted the part of the mourners, beating their chests and giving other signs of grief. The Israelites according to Christ, act like boys who, out of sheer contrariness, interfere with the arrangements and make their companions cry out: "We play on flutes—as was done in dancing—and you do not want to dance; we sing dirges and make funeral music, and you do not want to take the part of mourners." Israel has rejected the austerity of the Baptist and his exhortations to penance, and now it refuses the kindness and elevating doctrines of Christ; the people are indeed like boys of a contrary disposition.

Application. One of the most dangerous conditions in spiritual life is the state of a "blasé," who refuses to be impressed by anything religious, neither by the truths which elevate and inspire the soul nor by those which make it serious and humble. If this disposition is only of short duration and caused by spiritual desolation, we must struggle against it by "making holy efforts," as St. Ignatius says; we dare not give way to it. But if it is habitual, it is due to pride, neglect of

duty and attachment to the world and worldly things, and is extremely dangerous. In this case the person suffering from this malady, without a miracle of grace, will hardly ever do anything to regain his spiritual health; others must pray and sacrifice in his stead. This shows again how necessary it is for us to watch over ourselves, conquer our pride, faithfully discharge our duties, keep our heart detached from the world, and guard against becoming sophisticated in spiritual matters.

II. ISRAEL EVIL-MINDED. "For John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say: He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners." The sophisticated Israelites not only refused to be impressed by the Baptist and Christ, but vindicated their attitude by grossly misinterpreting the actions of both in a manner which only evil-minded persons could excogitate. We have the Savior's own testimony for it. For them the Baptist's penances were eccentricities, his announcements of the approaching divine judgment, mere hallucinations, and he himself was a fanatic, possessed by the devil. When he demanded conversion and penance from the "holy" Pharisees and the Sadducean materialists, he was denounced as a dupe of hell and said to be controlled by a demon.

Neither Pharisees nor Sadducees could accuse Christ of eccentricity, because His manner of living showed

nothing out of the ordinary and His preaching was moderate and gentle. Nevertheless, they were not at a loss for sinister misinterpretations. He was not only too insignificant to be a divine messenger, since He came from Nazareth and lived like an ordinary man, but He did not observe the Pharisaical fasts, accepted the food and drink offered Him, and, therefore, was made out to be a glutton and an intemperate drinker of wine. Nay, He was a great sinner not only on account of His "intemperance" in food and drink, but because He associated with publicans and sinners. Thus they also took revenge for the stinging rebuke He administered to them on the occasion of Matthew's banquet, when He declared to them that He must associate with sinners, and accused them of gross ignorance of the Scriptures.

Applications. 1) Let us make an act of atonement for the insults of which Christ complains here. In the reproachful remarks He makes, we can see how keenly He felt them. Let us ask pardon for all offences we have committed not only by neglecting, but also by criticizing the directions God gives us through our superiors. Let us realize that man can deceive himself and get around the clearest religious truths when they do not suit his fancy, and that he is apt to regard one who reminds him of his duty, either as a rigorist or as evil-minded.

2) Can we be surprised if our efforts for the good of souls are at times misinterpreted and if in return we

are calumniated? If even the Baptist and the Son of God could not escape such treatment, how much less can we?

III. GOD'S WAYS VARIOUS, BUT WISE. "And Wisdom is justified by her children," or, according to the Greek text, "by her works." Christ Himself said that His ways differed from those of the Baptist. Besides the difference in personal conduct, we see another great dissimilarity in their mode of preaching. Both, however, pursued the same end, and we may doubt whether Christ could have preached as He did, had He not been preceded by John, who roused the people by proposing the terrors of the divine judgment. Israel certainly needed the example and the serious words of the austere prophet in the desert. But Christianity would have lost its most precious characteristic, and the men, women, and children of all future ages would never have learned to appreciate the kind, meek, and humble character of the Savior and His religion.

Moreover, God owed it to Himself to deprive Israel of every excuse for refusing to accept the Messias. It should not be able to allege ignorance of the important decision before which it was placed, or to maintain that God might have done more. In full justice the Savior could ask: "What is there that I ought to have done to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?" (Is. 5,4). The Apostles, the disciples, and all who listened to the preaching of the Baptist, received the baptism of pen-

ance, and then believed in Jesus Christ, are its justification; all the efforts of Christ are its apology.

Applications. 1) This entire passage must fill us with great confidence in the mercy and kindness of God, our Savior. Our salvation is of greater concern to Him than to ourselves. He is not a severe judge, bent only on meting out strict justice, remunerative or punitive. This is the Jansenistic conception against which Pius X and Pius XI warn us.

2) Let us bravely and conscientiously follow the road on which God leads us, and realize that we have no excuse to offer for our want of fidelity. The Israelites could not complain against Yahweh for not sending them the kind of Messias they wanted, and for not humoring them in their unjustifiable demands. They perished because they were not ready to surrender to God, but insisted on God's surrendering to them. We must not commit the same fatal mistake.

COLLOQUY. Make acts of atonement for waywardness and neglect in following the divine inspirations; ask for the grace of serving God in all simplicity and of lending an attentive ear to the voice of the Savior. "Thou hast held me by my right hand; and by thy will thou hast conducted me, and with thy glory thou hast received me" (Ps. 72,24).

Meditation 17

THE WOE PRONOUNCED OVER THE CITIES OF GALILEE

(Matt. 11,20–24)

"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of his miracles, for that they had not done penance. Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? thou shalt go down even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, [perhaps] it had remained unto this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee."

The Lord, about to be forced out of Galilee, made a last effort to get the people to realize the spiritual danger they were in because of their attitude towards the Gospel. The "woe" He pronounced against Corozain, Bethsaida, and Capharnaum is one of the saddest and most tragic incidents in the New Testament.

We ask for the grace that we may never be deaf to the voice of God.

I. COROZAIN AND BETHSAIDA. A. THEIR SIN. "Then he began to upbraid the cities wherein were done the

most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance. Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes." From a comparison with the other gospels it appears that the events narrated in the present pericope occurred only after the Apostles had returned from their first mission, with rather poor success, so far as conversions were concerned. St. Matthew omits details of what took place between the question of the Baptist and Christ's "upbraiding of the cities wherein were done most of his miracles." He indicates this omission by introducing the new scene with the particle "then," which we find used in the first gospel more than eighty times to denote, not succession, but a longer period of time. Translated into modern English, it would have to be rendered by "about this time." Christ mentions Corozain and Bethsaida by name, but Matthew nowhere else says that these cities belonged to those places in which the Lord "wrought the most of his miracles."

As the sacred author says that Christ "*began* to upbraid the cities," it is likely that Jesus, who now was about to finish the preaching of the Gospel in Galilee and saw Himself gradually forced out of that unhappy province by the machinations of His enemies, repeatedly and in longer addresses expostulated with the stubborn Galileans. We cannot but think that when He reprimanded Corozain, Bethsaida, and Capharnaum, He did so either in these very places, or at least in the

presence of inhabitants of these cities. His sincerity and frankness would not permit Him to speak of people behind their backs.

The reformers of the sixteenth century understood the Greek words which our Douay version translates by "not having done penance" merely as "not having come to their senses," or "not having accepted the faith," or "not having given assent to the truth that He was the Messias." But this interpretation is too narrow, because the sacred author says that Jesus blamed them "for that they had not done penance." Christ demanded not merely a theoretical assent to His words, but a faith that proves itself in works. St. Mark sums up the substance of the preaching in Galilee in these words: "The time is accomplished, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1,15).

The scene here depicted is very sad indeed. The gentle and loving Savior, who was come to save all men, hurls a terrible malediction against the very people that have experienced His greatest kindness, and places them far below the Tyrians and Sidonians, who were notorious for their immoral and luxurious lives, whose names were by-words in Israel, whose religion was the deification of the most unnatural vices. He asserted that the miracles which the inhabitants of Corozain and Bethsaida had been privileged to witness within their very walls, would have roused those depraved Gentiles to such a spirit of compunction that they would have performed penances much greater than those the

kind Savior demanded of the cities in Galilee. They would have put on hair-shirts, sprinkled their heads with ashes, and, after the example of the king and people of Niniveh, would have assumed a most humble attitude, sitting on the ash-strewn ground to acknowledge their sinfulness and to protest their unworthiness. And yet, Christ did not demand these severe external penances; He would have been content with interior sorrow and amendment of life.

The Lord made this assertion about the Phenicians not from merely conjectural, but from certain knowledge. We dare not maintain that He judged from mere probabilities; for He said of Himself: "We speak what we know, and we testify what we have seen" (John 3,11). To base such a strong and humiliating accusation on mere guesswork would have been highly unjust and contrary to His character. What He said about the Tyrians and Sidonians was absolutely true and certain. But then, how great was the sin of Corozain and Bethsaida! How deeply ashamed ought they to have been!

Application. May the Lord never have to pronounce His terrible woe upon us for having spurned graces which, if offered to others—to poor pagans for instance—would have produced wonderful fruits of holiness. It will be profitable at times to ask ourselves what we would expect of others if they had had the graces vouchsafed to us as priests and religious—the daily celebration of the Holy Sacrifice, the recitation of the

divine office, the daily communion, the constant occupation with holy things, the daily meditation and examination of conscience, the deeper insight into spiritual things, the direction of our rules, so many inspirations and so forth.

B. THE PUNISHMENT. "But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you." If the preceding words were a crushing condemnation for Corozain and Bethsaida, what must we say of the judgment which the all-knowing Judge predicts for these cities? The immoral Phenicians will not be punished as severely on the day of reckoning as the Galileans! Why? Because the former had only the natural law and the few truths of the primitive revelation to guide them, whereas the latter sinned against the light, which not only inspired men of the Old Testament, but which Christ with all His teaching and miracles had kindled for them. The Phenicians scorned only the voice of conscience, the Galileans despised the voice of the greatest of the prophets and of the God-Man. The former rejected the comparatively few graces accorded to pagans, the latter the abundance of graces offered by the Son of God. Therefore, the former sinned with considerably less malice and contumacy than the latter. The gravity of a sin lies in the maliciousness of the will and this maliciousness is proportional not only to the de-ordination of the act itself, but to the wickedness of the sinner, or, as the theologians say, to the circumstances of the act.

Application. As Corozain's and Bethsaida's resistance to grace was far more sinful than that of Tyre and Sidon, so the deliberate offences of priests and religious are more grievous than those of seculars. Moreover, as they have more graces offered them, they are more liable to sins of omission. Hence they must make greater efforts not only to avoid doing what is contrary to the law of God, but also to avoid wasting precious graces put at their disposal. Hence in the daily examination of conscience they ought to ask themselves whether they have rejected any grace. "It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment" for the people in the world than for those bound to the special service of God, but neglectful and ungenerous in it.

II. CAPHARNAUM. A. ITS SIN. "And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? thou shalt go down even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, [perhaps] it had remained unto this day." A more modern version of the text would be this: "And thou, Capharnaum, dost thou think that thou wilt grow into the high heavens? Thou shalt sink down into the depth of hell. For if the miracles which have been wrought in thee, had been wrought in Sodom, it would exist to this day." We have to notice here that the particle "perhaps," which the Vulgate and the Douay version insert before the words "it had remained," does not occur in the Greek text. The Vulgate here, as in many other places, translates the Greek particle *"an,"* which occurs in conditional

sentences and has no equivalent in Latin and English. But it certainly does not mean "perhaps." The same particle occurs also in the sentence "Tyre and Sidon would long ago have done penance," where the Vulgate correctly omits the word "perhaps." Christ knew what the people of Sodom would have done if they had seen His miracles, with the same certainty as He knew how the Tyrians and Sidonians would have acted if they had been offered the graces given to Corozain and Bethsaida.

Christ now apostrophizes Capharnaum, "His own city," as it is called in the gospels. Capharnaum at this time was the most important city of Galilee, with a flourishing commerce, famous throughout Syria. In a tone of indignation and surprise He questions its inhabitants whether they really believe that the riches and glory of their city will go on increasing until they reach the sky, and answers most emphatically that, far from it, their town will fall into the abyss of ruin and oblivion, so that not a trace will be left of it. His prediction has come true; for today not a single ruin is left of the once flourishing city, and even its site is unknown. Moreover, commentators of note hold that Christ in these words referred not only to the fate of the city, but also to the eternal ruin of at least many of its inhabitants.

He goes on to remind the city of the numerous miracles of which it was the privileged witness. Capharnaum in fact was the scene of more miracles than any other place in the whole of Palestine. Here the Lord

cured Peter's mother-in-law and in the evening of the same day healed large multitudes of sufferers and freed demoniacs. Here He cured the paralytic, the centurion's servant, the woman suffering from an issue of blood, the two blind men. Here He resurrected Jairus' daughter, caused the miraculous draft of fishes, and walked on the water. Capharnaum, too, heard Him preach more frequently than any other place, for it would seem that as a rule He spoke on the Sabbath in one of its synagogues. Capharnaum experienced more than any other town the charm of His wonderful personality and the divine wisdom of His sermons. Capharnaum had been the objective of thousands of pilgrims from all Syria, who sought the Lord in their troubles and went home consoled and happy. Sodom would have been saved if there had been but ten just men within its walls; Capharnaum might have secured divine protection against all enemies had she offered protection and safety to her greatest citizen instead of merely standing by or actually co-operating in the machinations of His enemies. But she preferred her commerce and her luxuries and flouted the idea of conversion and penance. The Capharnaites were dyed-in-the-wool secularists.

Application. Secularism is a most dangerous frame of mind; it works not only eternal, but likewise temporal ruin, because it takes away the basis of all genuine prosperity, religion and piety. But while pernicious to all, it is doubly fatal to those to whom God offers extraordinary spiritual favors; and among these persons we

must count every priest and every religious. The fate of Capharnaum must warn us to guard against secularism and to protect the souls entrusted to us against its influence. Modern education, even in Catholic schools and Catholic homes, is in danger of being secularized. Under the plea of being "up to date," even our hospitals, our orphan asylums, our boarding schools, are threatened by the spirit of secularism. Let us not connive with secularists.

B. THE PUNISHMENT. "But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee." The Israelites could think of no sinners greater than the Sodomites, whose unnatural crimes cried to heaven and unloosened floods of fire and brimstone; and could imagine no fate worse than that of the land covered by the Dead Sea, which was burned away from the face of the earth without leaving a trace, but only a yawning chasm gradually filled up with water that kills all life. And now the Lord told the Capharnaites that on the day of judgment they would fare worse than the land of Sodom; that, consequently, their guilt was greater than that of the Sodomites. He indicated the reason for this when He said that if the miracles which had occurred in Capharnaum had been wrought in Sodom, its people would have hastened to placate the divine anger and would have been so thoroughly converted to God that their city would still be in existence, more than a thousand years later. The people of Sodom, though steeped in the worst sins

of unnatural immorality, were not so hardened in their infidelity and stubborn resistance against the divine revelation as were the Capharnaites. They sinned, but they had much fewer graces than the people of the city at the northern end of the Lake of Galilee; and finally their crimes were not so great as the crime of Christ's own city. For, in themselves, the sins committed directly against God, or, as the theologians say, against the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, are more grievous than those committed directly against men or, as the theologians say, against the moral virtues, and thus only indirectly against God. The contempt of God and the contumacy against grace were infinitely greater in the Capharnaites than in the people of Sodom.

Application. We ask: What will be the fate of priests and religious who obstinately resist the graces of their vocation and become habitually faithless to their sacred calling? "Thou shalt go down even unto hell." If we are seriously determined to escape this fate, we must not only love God more, hope and trust in Him more, have a deeper and livelier faith than the people in the world, but entertain a wise and reasonable fear of ourselves, mistrust our own weakness, and therefore avoid the occasions of sin, be convinced that the loss of our vocation means for us eternal damnation, and be ready to make any sacrifice, even that of life itself, rather than risk our vocation. No occupation, be it ever so pleasing to us and beneficial for souls, no position, no place, no claim to our personal reputation can outweigh the grace

of our vocation, as no amount of pleasure can paralyze the pain of hell and no amount of honor on earth can fill up the depth of eternal degradation.

III. THE EFFECT. As stated before, this pericope in its terror is probably the most dramatic scene in the whole gospel. The Lord manifests a seriousness which has no equal in the entire sacred account. It is gruesome to hear the Son of God apostrophize the cities of Galilee with a vehemence which we should hardly expect of Him, to hear Him hurl His powerful woe against entire populations, and pronounce a terrifying curse against that place which is distinguished by the title of "His Own City." That proud community is threatened with a fate worse than that of Jerusalem, whose inhabitants He never consigned to the realm of death and damnation in the terms which He uses here.

But when He uttered these frightful words, the fate could still be averted; indeed He uttered them for the purpose of making the people enter into themselves. And though His purpose was frustrated for the time being and never attained for the generality of the Galileans, we may justly suppose that when, thirty years later, the legions of Vespasian came to execute the divine vengeance, laid Galilee waste and slew many of its inhabitants, some remembered Christ's words and turned to Him. Meanwhile, however, the people of Capharnaum either sided with the Sanhedrin in its efforts to expel the Savior from Galilee, or at least stood by idly and did nothing to shield the Messias.

Applications. 1) Here we see to what lengths we have to go in order to save souls. At times we have to be almost cruel and to use very severe words and measures. Let us never think that, if a person is bound to go to hell, this is solely his own concern. Such was not Christ's attitude. While our efforts must be guided by a charitable prudence, we ought not to hesitate to adopt strong measures when necessary.

2) But this serious scene has also a consoling feature. It shows us how deeply interested the Lord is in our salvation. If He makes such supreme efforts in the case of persons so perverted and obstinate as the people of Corozain, Bethsaida, and Capharnaum, what will He not do for those who have good will? Yes, with a modicum of good will all will be well.

3) Let us never feel offended if our Superiors and spiritual directors consider themselves obliged to speak to us seriously and to exhibit severity in the correction of our faults. As a rule they do not like to do so; it is an act of charity on their part, which costs them a hard effort, and for which we ought to be duly grateful. If the correction is not deserved, let us accept it humbly, to atone for our pride and for the contempt with which the Galileans treated the warning of the Savior.

COLLOQUY. Thank God for the corrections by your Superiors and for the trials by means of which He has either brought you back to the right road or kept you

on it. Pray for the grace of understanding the seriousness of His judgments and the importance of fidelity to your vocation. Ask Him for the gift of properly moderating kindness and severity towards those entrusted to your care. "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear: for I am afraid of thy judgments" (Ps. 118,120).

Meditation 18

CHRIST'S POSITION

(Matt. 11,25–30)

"At that time Jesus answered and said: I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father; for so hath it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me by my Father. And no one knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither doth any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal him. Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light."

The purpose of the Evangelist in quoting these words of Christ is a twofold one; he wishes to bring out the dignity and the true character of the Savior, which for many of his readers may have been obscured by the pre-

ceding description of His failure, and to point out the requirements for accepting the doctrines of Christ. At the same time he draws what we may call a most attractive pen-picture of the Lord's personality.

Let us ask for the grace of belonging to the "little ones," to whom God gives an understanding of His revelations.

I. CHRIST'S PRAYER. We translate from the Greek: "Somewhere about this time Christ answered and said: I praise and thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and sagacious, and hast revealed them to the infants as yet unable to speak. Yes, Father; for so Thy good pleasure is accomplished." The very first words of this pericope make us realize that the sacred author is about to narrate something which in the order of time is not immediately connected with the preceding. A comparison with the third gospel shows that Jesus spoke these words after the return of the seventy-two disciples.

In the text itself we find two Hebraisms which need some explanation. The Evangelist makes Jesus "answer," and yet we find no question to which the words that follow could be a reply. But time and again Christ is said to have "answered," either when His statement contained the solution of an objection which, though not made in explicit words, existed in the mind of His listeners, or when His words furnished an explanation which the writer wishes to make for the benefit of his readers. The latter is the case here. The description of

Christ's failure in the cities of Galilee might prompt the readers of the first gospel to object that if Christ really had been a divine messenger, God would have made His preaching more successful. St. Matthew meets this difficulty by showing that this want of success was in accordance with the divine plan; but instead of making this statement on his own authority, he gives Christ's explanation, and thus not only meets the objection, but exhibits the Savior's character in a new and wonderful light.

We have a second Hebraism in the Savior's words that God has "hid" the truth from the wise and sagacious, which signify that God, by not granting extraordinary graces, has permitted these persons to lapse into, or remain in, culpable ignorance. The "wise" are those who, in their conceited and worldly wisdom, expect a Messias of pomp and secular power, and therefore, scorn Christ's admonitions to penance and His humble and modest appearance; the "prudent" or "astute" are men like the shrewd businessmen of Capharnaum and the fastidious Scribes, who despise the grave sermons of the Baptist and the plain talk of the Savior. God leaves them in their self-chosen blindness and wilful stubbornness and does not force upon them extraordinary lights and unmerited inspirations. Thus the truth remains hidden from their eyes.

But He thanks and praises the Father for having enabled "the infants as yet unable to speak" to accept the message, that is, those persons who, like children, willingly let themselves be taught and guided, and like

infants, are humble, because devoid of malice. They do not render themselves unworthy of receiving special graces. The Christian revelation is such that in all ages it is accepted only by those who are humble enough to acknowledge the limitations of the human mind and the claims of the all-knowing, veracious God, and who are neither hardened in obstinacy nor blinded by passion.

Thus the Kingdom of Christ will always be made up chiefly of people who are devoid of social, economic, and political influence and hence, in the eyes of the great world, it will be a failure. For this the Lord praises and thanks the "Father, Lord of heaven and earth," i. e., of all creation. He represents this apparent failure as a work of divine power; for, naturally speaking, a foundation against which the wealth, the intelligence, the power of the world are united in a formidable league, is doomed to extinction. He also praises it as the result of a special divine economy; it is not the result of untoward circumstances, nor is it contrary to the will of God.

But it is also true that this decree of the Father spells great humiliations and much suffering for Christ during His earthly life. Nevertheless, the Lord, as man, praises God, whom He addresses with great affection by calling Him "Father," and with great reverence by calling Him "Lord of heaven and earth." He thanks Him for having neglected His Son's merely human and temporal interests and for having arranged everything so that the divine will is fulfilled. We might almost say that, as the most unselfish servant of God, He feels relieved by this neglect.

Applications. 1) What a deep insight we are here privileged to take into the inner workings of the Sacred Heart! Let us ask the Savior to grant us a similar generous and unselfish desire for the glory of the Father, and to help us never to sacrifice divine interests to mere personal concerns.

2) Christ teaches us that the divine mysteries are revealed only to persons who before God deem themselves "infants unable to speak." This is true not only with respect to accepting the faith, but also with respect to becoming truly spiritual. We must read spiritual books, listen to conferences, make our meditations, accept the directions of our spiritual guide, with the simplicity and docility of children anxious to learn. We must not insist on being fed with startling ideas and brilliant phrases. If we praise a retreat or spiritual address for its elegant diction and brilliant thoughts, we have reason to fear that we have drawn scant spiritual profit from it. Moreover, if we devote much time to the perusal of secular magazines, written for entertainment rather than for giving genuine scientific or professional information, and on matters not concerning our work, God's truths will remain hidden from us.

II. CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD. We give the Greek text: "Everything was delivered to Me by My Father. And no one has complete and perfect knowledge of the Son but the Father; neither has any one complete and perfect knowledge of the Father but the Son and those to whom

the Son wants to grant a revelation." In the foregoing lines Christ spoke as man subject to God; now, however, He rises to the dignity of a Divine Person and in a few words explains His origin and power as the Divine Logos. The words which the first evangelist records here are almost identical with the beginning of the fourth gospel. Whatever the Father is and has, He *"has communicated"* with the Son—the Latin and Greek text use the past tense—for the First Divine Person from all eternity has been sharing not only His power, but also His complete divine nature with the Second. The next sentence explains this mode of communication, which the Greek text expresses more significantly than either the Latin or English version can do, since they lack a compound verb denoting complete and perfect knowledge. Only the Father has complete and perfect knowledge of the Son, and only the Son of the Father, not only because intuitive and comprehensive knowledge of the divine essence is impossible to any but a divine intellect, but because the Son is the Divine Word and the Father alone produces this Word. The Holy Ghost, indeed, also knows the Father and the Son, and They know Him, but Christ is speaking here of a personal attribute of Father and Son, which, if we may express the truth without the aid of technical terms, is not a "constituent element" of the Holy Ghost. The humble Nazarene here asserts His perfect equality with that Father of whom the Israelites say that He is Yahweh, their God.

The Savior in the next words, "and those to whom

He wants to grant a revelation," goes on to assert His divinity for a third time by claiming equality with the Father in another strictly divine attribute. He says that He decides to whom to make revelations, to reveal divine mysteries to children unable to speak—a power which, in the preceding sentence, He attributed to the Father.

Moreover, when He represents Himself as the one from whom all revelations come, He shows Himself as the Mediator between God and men. We have here, by the way, another instance of the manner in which Christ can express many fundamental truths in one brief sentence.

Thus, then, the humble and patient man, disowned by the wise and the shrewd and acknowledged only by children as yet unable to speak, is the equal of the Lord of heaven and earth. The choice of the title "Lord of heaven and earth" in this connection is very significant from the fact that this title is one frequently used in the Old Testament for Yahweh.

Applications. 1) Our vocation as priests and religious has a very special connection with the divinity of Christ. The sacerdotal dignity and the religious state are mere fictions of the mind if Christ is not God. For the priesthood is only a participation in His mediatorship and His eternal priesthood, both of which are based on His being God as well as man. The religious state is a special consecration, not to a mere creature, not to God the Father, but to one who, though distinct from the Father, has divine rights and powers. Because Christ is God as well

as man, He is worthy of our heart's best love. Let us live only for Him.

2) Let us also realize that belief in the Trinity is a special gift which we have received from Christ. It is the source of all graces here on earth and of our happiness in Heaven. In the name of the Trinity we have been baptized and raised to the supernatural order, and in the name of the Trinity we are blessed and strengthened for our passage into eternity. Let us thank the Savior and resolve to make good use of the privilege we enjoy. If men work, risk their lives and their wealth for the purpose of amassing money or obtaining distinctions on earth, can we do too much to secure the happiness of being forever with the Most Holy Trinity?

III. CHRIST'S INVITATION. "Come to me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh [relieve] you. Take up my yoke upon you and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: And you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is sweet [soft and smooth] and my burden light." In no other place of the Gospel do we hear the Savior utter such a tender invitation as here, where the failure of His efforts is recorded. He invites all sufferers of every description. According to many commentators He divides all sufferings into two classes, active and passive. To the former belong compliance with the numerous and rigid regulations of the Mosaic law, struggle against temptations, hard work, meeting opposition that must be overcome,

compliance with hard and painful duties; to the latter bodily and mental pain, depression, privations, qualms of conscience, fears. Jesus promises relief to every one that comes to Him.

The "yoke" of which He speaks in the next sentence is best explained as the obligations which His law imposes. For in Jewish phraseology such obligations are called "the yoke" of the law. This explanation furnishes the best connection with the next words, in which He invites all "to learn from Him," or, as the Greek text says, "to become His disciples." He, therefore, bids all to take upon themselves the yoke of His doctrine instead of the oppressive burdens which they have carried thus far. For the Israelites, oppressed by the regulations of the Mosaic code and the intolerable additions which Rabbinic theology had made to them, these words are of special significance. But also for the Gentiles, groaning under the burden of inordinate passions, His invitation is most consoling for the reasons and motives which He adds.

The first is His own character: "I am meek and humble of heart." Being meek, He is not a severe and hard master, not morose, exacting, hard to satisfy, but gentle, bearing with the faults and weaknesses of His disciples, making every possible allowance for human frailty. Being humble of heart, i. e., sincerely humble, He despises nobody. Unlike the Rabbis and the Pharisees, who speak "of the rabble that knoweth not the law," He has a good opinion of every one and is anxious to help all to forget His dignity, and to be the servant of all.

The second motive He gives is His assurance that they will find rest, relief for their souls. The phrase "for your souls" is a Hebraism, expressing an emphasized pronoun, and is perhaps best translated by "for yourselves."

Thirdly, He tells His hearers that the obligations of His doctrine are not too hard. "My yoke is sweet," or, as we should say in modern English, "soft and smooth, adapted to its bearer." A commentator in this connection very appropriately remarks: "As a rule it is not the weight of the yoke which causes the animal great discomfort, but its roughness and hardness." Christ adds: "My burden is light." How truly He speaks we can readily see when we compare the few precepts of the Christian law with the more than six hundred regulations of the Mosaic code and the explanations and extensions of them made by the Rabbis. Add to this that, when giving a precept, Christ also grants grace and help to comply with it; that He teaches us to fulfill our duties not from fear, which renders everything hard, but from love, which makes everything easy; that He holds out an eternal reward for every good work; and that His demands are never as hard and heavy as the demands of the devil, the world, and inordinate passions.

Applications. 1) Let us fully realize the amiability of our Savior and not only be filled with love and confidence by His kind words, but heed His invitation. In difficulties and troubles our steps ought to be directed towards the tabernacle as soon and as frequently as

possible. Let us seek consolation and strength from Him, and not from creatures.

2) Let us deepen our conviction that we must carry some yoke in this life. This necessity arises from our finite nature, which needs other beings. God alone is self-sufficient, whereas every creature is in a state of dependency on somebody else, either God, or other creatures. Thus we are not born masters, but born servants. But we can choose our master. Let us choose Christ.

COLLOQUY. Acts of faith, love, confidence, oblation to Christ. Prayer for greater love, confidence, and docility. "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6,69).

Meditation 19

CHRIST, THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

(Matt. 12,1–8)

"At that time Jesus went through the corn on the sabbath: and his disciples being hungry, began to pluck the ears, and to eat. And the Pharisees seeing them said to him: Behold, thy disciples do what is not lawful to do on the sabbath days. But he said to them: Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the loaves of proposition, which it was not lawful for

him to eat, nor for them that were with him, but for the priests only? Or have ye not read in the law, that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple break the sabbath, and are without blame? But I tell you that there is here a greater than the temple. And if you knew what this meaneth: I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: you would never have condemned the innocent. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath."

The charge of breaking the Sabbath, which the Pharisees made against Christ's Apostles, and thus against Himself, gave our Lord an opportunity not only for clearly stating some principles concerning the Sabbatic rest and the duty of not judging another rashly, but also for declaring His own dignity.

At the same time we have here another glaring instance of the domineering spirit of the Pharisees and the hatred with which they spied on the Savior.

We pray for the grace of being preserved from the Pharisaical spirit.

I. THE LAW OF THE PHARISEES. "At that time Jesus went through the corn on the sabbath: and his disciples being hungry, began to pluck the ears, and to eat. And the Pharisees seeing them, said to him: Behold thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days." The Sabbatical rest prescribed by the code of Moses included abstinence only from all servile work, such as plowing, tilling, reaping, gathering kindling-wood, carrying loads, transporting merchandise, cooking, baking, and preparing meals; also selling, buying,

and other business transactions. The law was certainly much stricter than is the corresponding precept of the Church. But the Rabbis in their explanations went to incomprehensible lengths, forbidding even such insignificant actions as tying a knot, writing two letters of the alphabet, carrying one little fig beyond the confines of one's dwelling, etc. They applied it even to dumb animals and the working of natural forces. All actions pertaining to the relief or cure of an illness were particular objects of a most unreasonable and cruel prohibition; but more about this in the next meditation.

The Apostles, walking through the fields on the Sabbath and having nothing to eat, made use of a permission expressly granted in Deuteronomy (23,25). They plucked some ears of wheat or corn, rubbed them in their hands, and ate the grains. But this action, according to the rigorists, contained a double violation of the Sabbatic rest, that of preparing a meal and that of carrying a load. Combining the accounts of the first three evangelists we must say that the Pharisees expostulated with the offenders themselves and interrogated their Master on this great sin. We see here an example of the system of espionage which was kept up against the Lord and His disciples, and of the cruel disposition of the Pharisees, demanding as they did that Christ and His entourage suffer not only the heat of the summer, but also the pangs of hunger. We notice also the poverty of the little group.

What prompted this rigor? Not the desire for God's glory and the spiritual welfare of men, but a morbid

craving for domination and odious restrictions. An authority on the Rabbinic writings tells us that in the twenty-four long chapters of the Talmud concerning the Sabbatic rest there "is not a single trace of anything spiritual, nor even a word to suggest higher thoughts of God's holy day and its observance" (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus,* Vol. II, p. 778).

Applications. 1) We must admire the patience of Christ in dealing with such people. But let us realize also that no zealous worker in the Lord's vineyard can escape similar treatment. He will be spied upon; there are persons enough to be found all the world over who take a fiendish delight in discovering something in priests and religious to which they can object. Let us bear this cross with and for our Savior.

2) Let us be very careful not to yield, even unconsciously, to the tendency so natural in man of picking flaws in the doings of persons or societies that do not find favor with him. This lamentable inclination is apt to render even a good person cruel and inhuman in his judgments and dealings.

II. THE LAW OF REASON. "But he said to them: Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and they that were with him: how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the loaves of proposition, which it was not lawful for him to eat, nor for them that were with him, but for the priests only? Or have ye not read

in the law that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple break the sabbath, and are without blame? But I tell you that there is here a greater than the temple." There is only one law which suffers no exception or dispensation—the natural law, for it alone prohibits actions which are bad by their very nature and commands such as are in their very essence absolutely necessary for man's last end, so that the omission of them is equivalent to ceasing to strive for the last end and neglecting an indispensable duty. Every other law, whether divine or human, ceases to obligate under certain conditions. One of the ordinary cases in which every precept except those of the natural law ceases to bind, occurs whenever compliance with the precept entails a greater difficulty or sacrifice than is proportionate to the good to be secured by its observance.

The Savior had recourse to this principle in His answer to the Pharisees. He did not consider the accidental fault they committed by their exaggerated interpretation of what constituted "work" forbidden by the law of Moses, but attacked their principal error, which consisted in attributing to a positive though divine law the absolute valor of a precept of the natural law. In words expressing surprise, He put them to shame by asking those men, who prided themselves on their knowledge of the Scriptures, whether they had never read the account of an action of David contained in the first book of Kings (21,1ff.). David, on his flight from Saul, asked the high-priest Achimelech for some loaves of bread to appease his own hunger and that of his com-

panions. The high-priest had only some consecrated bread, "loaves of proposition," as they were called, which had been offered in the temple and might be eaten only by priests. The holy king and the conscientious high-priest, though fully aware of the prohibitory law, had no scruple in disregarding it under existing conditions. All Pharisees declared that David's action was perfectly correct and justified by necessity. Similarly they had to grant that a precept of the positive divine law did not bind in the case of necessity in which the Apostles found themselves when they plucked the ears of grain on the Sabbath day.

To this explanation the Lord added another, when He went on to ask them, in the same tone of surprise and censure, whether they had never read the passages of the Bible which declared that none of the servile work necessary for the sacrifices, was contrary to the law forbidding work on the Sabbath. The work in question was by no means short and easy. Slaughtering the victims, skinning and cutting the carcasses, building and feeding the fires on the altars, removing the ashes and the waste, and other manipulations certainly were material violations of the Sabbatic rest, justifying the Lord in saying: "On the sabbath days the priests in the temple break the sabbath." But the performance of the divine service was a more important obligation than that of abstaining from work. Now it is a principle of reason and of the natural law that the less important obligation must yield to the more important if both cannot be fulfilled together. Therefore, the priests engaged in the service of

the temple on the Sabbath days were, as Christ said, "without blame," committed no sin. The necessity for the divine service was their excuse.

But this excuse held good also in the case of the Apostles. For the Savior added: "But I tell you that there is here a greater than the temple." The temple gave the servile work of the priests the character of a divine service. But the Twelve served a Being much holier than the temple built of stone; they ministered to the living temple of the Divinity, the God-Man, in whom the Divinity resides. These ministrations demanded so much physical strength that, when they plucked the ears of the corn, they did so for a purpose connected with the service of this living temple of the Godhead and, therefore, they too were "without blame."

We may notice here, in passing, the clear, concrete, and popular manner in which the Savior explains and illustrates abstract principles, and the readiness with which He makes use of an authority against which no Pharisee dares to object. The Old Testament, David, the priests, the ministrations of the temple, are for them above objection.

Applications. 1) It was not only loyalty to His friends and servants which prompted Christ to make this defence of His Apostles, but also His serious concern for truth and man's rights and liberties. Time and again we find Him protesting against the encroachments upon truth, human rights, and human liberties, of which the Pharisees were guilty. His high sense of justice, and

still more His great solicitude for our welfare, made Him do so. He knew that generosity in God's service, and with it progress in virtue and merit, are morally impossible for men if oppressed by a multitude of strict and narrow regulations; only hearts which feel free can be generous. Hence His care not to multiply duties, but, as far as possible to assert our moral liberty. Here we come to a principle of the utmost importance for our own spiritual welfare and the direction of others. We too must know, for our own benefit as well as for that of those entrusted to our guidance, what is of strict obligation and what is left to free choice, so that we may never unduly exaggerate obligations. Not indeed for the purpose of confining our virtuous practices and theirs to the minimum of strict duty, but in order that both we and they can serve God with a free mind and a loving heart. Generosity, not fear, is the foundation of sanctity.

2) We must also admire the reasonableness of Christ's asceticism. The world thinks that asceticism by its very nature is unreasonable. Non-Christian asceticism often is unreasonable; Christian asceticism never. It runs counter only to the false reasoning of ignorant or fallen nature, but faithfully observes the genuine dictates of reason and faith. What cannot be justified by the combined dictates of reason and faith has no place in genuine Christian asceticism.

III. THE LAW OF CHRIST. "And if you knew what this meaneth: I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: you would

never have condemned the innocent. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath."

A. THE VIOLATION OF CHARITY. If the accusation of the Pharisees was highly unjust for the reasons so far given, it contained still greater malice in that it was a flagrant violation of the highest law of the Old as well as of the New Testament—the law of charity. The Lord, in continuing His defence of the Apostles, became really bitter when He charged the accusers with ignorance of this law. Charity obliges everybody to put the more favorable construction on an action of his neighbor, so far as this is reasonably possible. With unconcealed indignation Jesus said: "If you knew what this meaneth: I [Yahweh] will have mercy, and not sacrifice: you would never have condemned the innocent." Mercy, a function of charity, is a strict duty, but to have a sacrifice offered in the temple is, as a rule, not a matter of obligation, but of free choice and supererogation. The Savior's words imply that the Pharisees, in telling Him that His disciples "did that which was not lawful to do on the sabbath days," not merely wanted to call His attention to the external action of the Twelve, but also considered them guilty of a grave and wilful sin. What reason did they have to suppose that the hungry men deliberately acted against their conscience and did not believe themselves justified by their need?

And now He rose to the full dignity of a Divine Person when He solemnly declared: "The Son of man is

Lord even of the sabbath." The Sabbath in the Old Testament was called "Yahweh's day," the day belonging to God, the day of which Yahweh was the supreme and exclusive master. Therefore, when Christ declared that He was the Lord of the Sabbath, He implied that He was a divine Person and that, with the fullness of divine power, He had sanctioned the action of His Apostles.

Applications. 1) Let us make an act of faith in Christ's divinity and resolve to serve Him with generosity and confidence, in return for the liberality with which He treats us, and for the loyalty with which He stands by us.

2) Let us heed His warning against rashly judging the conduct of others, and His demand that, whenever possible, we interpret their actions favorably.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST'S REPLY. We may at first be surprised that neither in this nor in the following incident Christ touched upon what might seem to us the more important error of the Pharisees concerning the duty of the Sabbatic rest, namely, the unreasonable and inhuman interpretation of the Rabbis. He rested satisfied with stating the correct doctrine about the cessation of obligations in this matter. But two weighty reasons seem to have determined His reply. The first was that He found Himself compelled to prevent the scandal

which the ordinary and simple-minded people would take if He did not prove to them, by reference to well-known instances in the history of the nation and by an argumentation which they could grasp, that the almost idolatrous observance of the Sabbath which the Rabbis had foisted upon them, was wrong and not intended by God. This result He could not attain if He showed that merely one or the other particular demand of the Pharisees was unfounded and unreasonable. He had to explain to them that all the regulations concerning the Sabbatic rest were such that they lost their binding force under certain conditions. The accusation of having broken the Sabbath was one of the staple charges made against Him, and, therefore, needed a refutation based on general principles applicable to all cases.

The second reason was that He had to show Himself as "the Lord even of the sabbath," in order to convince the people of His divinity and make them see the difference between the Old and the New Law. How frequently did not the writers of the Old Testament insist on the Sabbatical rest. Even in the eyes of pagan writers of the time observance of the Sabbath was one of the prominent features of the Old Testament religion. As we said before, the Sabbath was the Lord's day, and to grant a dispensation from the Sabbatic rest was, in the opinion of the Jews, an act reserved solely to the Divine Legislator Himself. Hence, claiming this power, exercising it, and proving it by means of miracles worked precisely for this purpose, was for Christ a means of manifest-

ing His divine dignity, which He could not forego. It was, therefore, a solemn moment when Jesus said: "The Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath." That incident could not be omitted in a gospel written expressly for the Israelites.

Applications. 1) The Lord gives us here an instance of the care with which we must avoid giving scandal to the people. As priests and religious we are constantly watched by scrutinizing eyes. We must, therefore, anxiously avoid giving scandal.

2) We notice also how often the Lord tried to impress the people with the truth that He was a Divine Person. Faith in His divinity is really the foundation-stone of our holy religion, and we are more perfect Christians the more deeply we are impressed by this truth. Our life must be a constant and personal service of Christ. But it will be such only if we are deeply impressed with the truth that we have devoted our whole existence on earth to a Divine Person.

COLLOQUY. Make an act of faith in the Divinity of Christ; thank Him for the great freedom He has given you; make an act of confidence in His loyalty and kindness; resolve to serve Him generously; ask Him for this grace. "Being delivered from the hands of our enemies, let us serve him without fear in holiness and justice before him, all our days" (Luke 1,74f.).

Meditation 20

THE SABBATH QUESTION AGAIN

(Matt. 12,9–15*a*)

"And when he had passed from thence, he came into their synagogues. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand, and they asked him saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. But he said to them: What man shall there be among you, that hath one sheep: and if the same fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not take hold on it and lift it up? How much better is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do a good deed on the sabbath days. Then he saith to the man: Stretch forth thy hand, and it was restored to health even as the other. But the Pharisees going out made a consultation against him, how they might destroy him. But Jesus knowing it, retired from thence."

Our Lord, after the occurrence described in the foregoing meditation, went to preach in the synagogues of Judea. It happened that on one of the next Sabbath days a man with a crippled hand was present and the Pharisees availed themselves of the opportunity to try to inveigle Christ into an act which, according to Rabbinic teaching, was an open violation of the holy day. Jesus, before curing the man, refuted the wrong principle underlying their teaching; but, far from acknowledging their error, they resolved to slay Him as a violator

of the Sabbath. Jesus now had to retire a second time from Judea.

Let us ask for the grace of being saved from the blindness of passion and of always keeping our minds open to conviction.

I. THE PLOT OF THE PHARISEES. "And when he had passed from thence, he came into their synagogues. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand, and they asked him, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him."

The scene described in this pericope, as well as that considered in the preceding meditation, occurred in Judea, whither the Lord had gone for the celebration of the second Pasch of His public career, and where He had made a second attempt to preach, after He had been forced out of it by the arrest of the Baptist. Here, therefore, we have another incident which, in the order of time, preceded the Sermon on the Mount and the choice of the Twelve. It happened shortly after the Apostles had plucked ears of corn on a Sabbath. It was again Sabbath, and Jesus saw Himself surrounded by a large multitude in the synagogue. The Pharisees evidently wanted to precipitate a crisis and beheld their chance in the presence of a man whose hand was crippled, shriveled up and without life—"withered," the sacred author calls it. The parallel accounts of St. Mark (3,1ff) and St. Luke (6,6ff) state that the Pharisees were watching Christ in order to accuse Him. In order to inveigle Him into an unlawful action or to make "the

offence" all the more evident, they asked: "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?" The Evangelist expressly mentions that their purpose in proposing this question was "that they might accuse him."

According to the teaching of the Rabbis, every action which served the purpose of curing or even of only relieving pain was forbidden on the Sabbath, unless the illness or pain was causing an immediate danger of death. Thus they declared that on the Sabbath one was not permitted to have a wound covered with a plaster which had a healing effect, but only with one which protected it against infection. A Rabbi, when consulted whether a certain drink which had a purgative effect might be taken on the Sabbath, replied it might be taken for pleasure, but not for a sanitary purpose.

Jesus had already given many proofs of His divinity and not long ago had declared that He was "the Lord even of the sabbath." Therefore, even if the rest of the Israelites were forbidden "to heal on the sabbath days," He could dispense Himself from this obligation. This conclusion ought to have been obvious to the learned Pharisees. But it was not; nor ought this blindness surprise us, for it was the natural result of their whole training and their antagonism against the Savior. In their fanaticism they do not seem to have had the least suspicion that possibly they might be mistaken and Jesus might be right. They had made up their minds once for all that the Galilean could not teach them anything and that His words counted for naught. Their passion did not let them reason soberly nor enter into Christ's ideas.

Therefore, they had nothing to say when the Lord, proposing the case about the sheep falling into the pit on the Sabbath, asked some very pertinent questions. Theirs was a conceited and stubborn silence; Rabbis in their opinion ought not to lower themselves by disputing and arguing with a Galilean. But their blindness, though very natural, was culpable, their intention to accuse Him, sinful, their purpose of making Him do something which in their opinion was against the law of God, very criminal, their plot of abusing Christ's well-known kindness for the avowed purpose of ruining Him, most damnable.

Applications. 1) Let us first of all make an act of atonement for the insult offered to the Savior. Next let us realize how important it is always to keep one's mind open to conviction, to be willing to listen and give consideration to what others have to say, and to be ready to discard even a favorite idea if it be false. It is only too true that even the most self-opinionated persons think that they are open to reason; but they could easily discover that they are not. They have only to ask themselves whether they are in the habit of cutting short one who tries to oppose their ideas, whether they listen to others only with the intention of refuting them, whether they have a sincere regard for the opinions of others, listen patiently and try to evaluate their reasons. Even good and saintly people can be very self-opinionated. Superiors, above all those who have been in office for a long time, are particularly liable to this defect.

2) It is above all necessary in matters related to conscience and the spiritual life to keep one's mind open to conviction, one's intellect and will ready to face and accept truths which are contrary to one's favorite opinions and notions. But this requires great humility and unselfishness. Our passions can deceive us to such a degree that we see not only a material and temporal, but a spiritual and eternal good, in what is really evil. Most dangerous is a passion which works in the field of religion and morality. We all know that nobody is more difficult to convert than a professed defender and propagator of a heresy, a religious fanatic. In the Modernists, the Sentimentalists, and the Femininists of our day we have telling examples. Zeal must come only after knowledge, and should always be combined with docility and obedience. When our Superiors or directors of conscience disapprove of a matter which seems very holy to us, we ought to submit and try to see it as they do.

II. THE HARD-HEARTEDNESS OF THE PHARISEES. "But he said to them: What man shall there be among you, that hath one sheep: and if the same fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not take hold on it and lift it up? How much better is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do a good deed on the sabbath days." St. Matthew only hints at the scene which now occurred. Jesus made the cripple "stand up in the midst. And he saith to them: Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save a life, or to destroy? But

they held their peace" (Mark 3,3–4). He went on to ask if one of their sheep had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath, who among them would not take hold of it and lift it out. This question struck home; for according to Rabbinical casuistry it was permissible to lift the animal out or carry food to it, even though one was forbidden to carry a little fig beyond the confines of his dwelling; for, leaving it in the pit without food would lessen its value and price, a great calamity in the eyes of these holy(?) businessmen. The Lord continued: "How far does a man excel over a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath days and forbidden to do evil." But letting a man continue to suffer when one is well able to relieve him, is evil because it is a violation of charity. Sin must be avoided above all on the day which is in an especial manner devoted to the service of God. On the contrary, to relieve a patient from suffering is a good deed, and commanded by the divine law, therefore, highly appropriate for the Sabbath. The Lord here pointed out another reason for dispensing from the observance of a positive law, namely, the demand of charity. In this case a higher positive law, that of charity, conflicted with one of a lower order, that concerning the sabbatic rest, consequently the higher must prevail. At the same time Christ tactfully but effectively castigated the cruelty of the Pharisees and made an appeal to the bystanders to follow Him rather than their hard-hearted masters.

Applications. 1) The Church, filled with the spirit of her divine Founder, is moderate, considerate, and gentle

in her government. Let us be grateful for this blessing and imitate her example in dealing with those entrusted to us. Nowhere even today do we find so much consideration in any other government.

2) The mildness of Christ must inspire us with great confidence. We serve a good master. Let us renew the resolution of devoting all our powers to Him. The more we forget ourselves, the kinder will He be to us.

III. THE MALICE OF THE PHARISEES. "Then he said to the man: Stretch forth thy hand; and he stretched it forth, and it was restored to health even as the other. And the Pharisees going out made a consultation against him, how they might destroy him. But Jesus, knowing this, retired from thence." Christ did not again appeal to the written word of God, as on a former occasion, but to the power of God. He told the cripple, who was standing in full view of the assembled multitude, to stretch forth his hand, and immediately life and full vigor returned to the crippled limb; "it was restored to health even as the other." The miracle worked under the conditions described above was a divine confirmation of the Lord's doctrine about healing and the Sabbath, of His condemnation of the cruelty of the Pharisees, and of His claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath. But instead of bringing the Pharisees to their senses, it only exasperated them, to such a degree that they made plans for His death. Nay more, St. Mark tells us that they "immediately made consultation with the Herodians

how they might destroy him" (Mark 3,6). Though, as religious and nationalistic fanatics, they deeply hated the Herodians on account of their lax principles, their loose mode of life, and their friendship with the Romans, they now made common cause with them for His death.

Here we have another instance of the humiliations Christ had to suffer during His earthly career. He had come to Judea to celebrate the second Pasch in His public life according to the Mosaic law and to work among the Judeans. Concerning this second sojourn in Judea the gospels mention only the cure of the man languishing thirty-eight years near the pool of Bethesda, Christ's public declaration of His divine sonship, the two disputes about the Sabbatic rest, the cure of the man with the withered hand and the Pharisaic-Herodian alliance. The Lord now had to retreat for a second time into Galilee; a similar alliance during His first sojourn in Judea had resulted in the arrest of the Baptist and compelled the Savior to leave the confines of Judea.

Application. Truly does St. Ignatius say that Christ during His entire life on earth showed a marked preference for humiliations. He had to make war on pride, and it cost Him very much to make us willing to accept humiliations, the only remedy which can heal our innate pride. Human prudence might have demurred at the constant humiliations to which He was subjected, on the plea that the Messianic dignity and Messianic work would seriously suffer from them. But granted that His dignity and His work in Israel suffered to some

extent from these ignominious defeats, it is doubtful whether without them He would have had much greater success. But what about the success to be achieved among the rest of mankind? How little humility would be practiced even by Christians, above all by those called to the life of perfection, had He not been subjected to so much disgrace! Thus, the temporary defeat and failure were only the means to an ultimate greater success. Let us convince ourselves that while humiliations may at times stand in the way of immediate but smaller results, they never destroy, but always enhance, the ultimate and lasting success and frequently are the means of even immediate great accomplishments.

Let us resolve to follow the Lord in the humiliations which our life and our vocation entail; patience in offences, submissiveness in rebukes, even though they be undeserved, obedience to directions, resignation to slights and snubs, cheerfulness when others are preferred to us; contentment in subordinate or less honorable positions and occupations.

COLLOQUY. Make acts of reparation for the insults Christ suffered on this occasion; of gratitude for having been freed by Him from the yoke of passions; of oblation by offering to follow the humble and humiliated Christ; of petition for the spirit of humility and strength to bear humiliations. "We have rejoiced for the days in which thou hast humbled us, for the years in which we have seen evils" (Ps. 89,15).

Meditation 21

ANOTHER PROPHECY FULFILLED

(Matt. 12,15^{b}–21)

"And many followed him, and he healed them all. And he charged them that they should not make him known. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaias the prophet, saying: Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul hath been well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not contend, nor cry out, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. The bruised reed he shall not break: and the smoking flax he shall not extinguish: till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name the Gentiles shall hope."

On His retreat into Galilee the Savior was followed by many people. He healed all their sick, but, in order not to provoke His enemies, He strictly enjoined silence about the cures and avoided all sensation and noise. In this He fulfilled an important prophecy and at the same time gave a warning to Israel that the predictions about the Messianic graces being taken away from it and given to the Gentiles would also come true.

We ask for the grace of not being deaf to God's invitation and of not abusing His patience and long-suffering.

1. CHRIST'S UNOSTENTATIOUS WORK. "And many followed Him, and He healed them all. And He charged them that they should not make Him known." Instead of exposing the unholy alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians and lashing the people into fury against their oppressors, the Lord quietly withdrew into Galilee. This was the third time that, rather than make use of His power, He beat an ignominious retreat before His enemies; the first time He fled into Egypt, the second and the third times He withdrew into Galilee. This third retreat was all the more disgraceful because it proved that with all His wonderful sermons and His astounding miracles He had not succeeded in winning the people to His person and cause. They remained undecided between Him, who offered them freedom from oppression together with signal benefits, and the Pharisees who harassed them with their inhuman demands. With strange inconsistency, however, they continued to flock to His sermons and to bring their sick to be cured by Him. Since they did not attack Him, He permitted them to follow Him and without discrimination gave relief to every one who had courage enough to come to Him with his troubles.

In this considerate kindness Jesus went even farther. He seriously enjoined all to keep His miracles quiet and refrain from spreading His fame. By this He intended to avoid provoking His enemies still more, and to spare the people, above all those cured by Him, from further trouble. And yet He knew all the time how this cold in-

decision of the people would grow into fear and suspicion and end in the cry: "Crucify Him!"

Applications. 1) Let us admire the kindness and patience of our Savior. Instances of a similar kind we can find in all centuries of the Church, nay, possibly in our own lives and in the lives of some whom we know. If ever we have given Him occasion for this forbearance and mercy, let us be sorry and resolve to atone for it by greater zeal in His service.

2) Let us in particular call to mind that in the Blessed Sacrament Christ continues this forbearing patience and kindness, teaching and healing unostentatiously and taking care that the infidel and hostile world does not become aware of it and be roused to greater fury.

II. THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECIES. "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaias the prophet, saying: Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul hath been well pleased. I will put [I have put] my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment [the truth and the norm of justice and virtue] to the Gentiles. He shall not contend, nor cry out, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. The bruised reed he shall not break and the smoking flax he shall not extinguish."

A. JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE MESSIAS. Keeping his first object always in view, St. Matthew here shows the Palestinian Israelites that in the meekness and forbear-

ance just described, is found another characteristic by which, according to the prophet Isaias, they are to recognize the Messias. The "Evangelist of the Old Testament," as Isaias is justly styled, first makes it clear that, by divine authority, he is going to predict something about the Christ. He introduces Yahweh as speaking and saying that the signs by which the Israelites will know their Messias are these: that He is not contentious, but humble; does not insist on His rights, but yields; preaches without much noise and is averse to ostentation; does not despise and crush those of weak faith and little good will, but tries to win them by considerate kindness.

Let us consider the prophecy in detail. God states, first of all, that He will speak about the Messias; for "Yahweh's faithful servant," "Yahweh's beloved," "He to whom Yahweh has given His spirit," "He who gives to the Gentiles the doctrines of truth and the law of God," are designations of the Messias with which the Israelites are familiar. God continues: "He shall not contend," i. e., He will be peaceable and will avoid all contention as far as lies in His power. "He will not cry out," the Hebrew and Greek texts say: "He will not wrangle," i. e., He will not insist stubbornly on His rights, but be ready to waive them for the sake of peace and charity. "Neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets," i. e., He will not manifest Himself with great pomp and ostentation, but be modest, humble, and unassuming. "The bruised reed he shall not break"; here the commentators do not agree in the details of their explanation, but the idea evidently is that the Messias

will not completely ruin the little faith and small good will of the people. According to the parallelism so frequent in the diction of the Orient, the idea is repeated in another comparison: "He will not extinguish the wick which for want of sufficient oil only smoulders and smokes instead of giving a clear light; He will rather add more oil and try to have it send out a clear flame; He will not mind the inconvenience of the smoke." Divesting the thought of its metaphor, we can give the meaning of these words by saying that the Savior will try to increase and develop the little faith and small good will of the people and not drive them by severity into complete infidelity and opposition to His person and doctrine. How perfectly was this prophecy fulfilled in Christ! He did not insist on His right, but shaped His demands and adapted His teaching as far as possible to the disposition of the people; He was infinitely patient with them and even avoided every provocation, in order not to drive His enemies deeper into infidelity and hatred.

These four characteristic signs of the Messias are specifically Christian virtues:—peaceableness as long as no principle is sacrificed, self-forgetfulness in waiving one's rights, humility in speech and conduct, readiness to help as long as this kindness is not abused;—they were unknown on earth until the Savior brought them from Heaven. They are miracles of the moral order.

Applications. 1) Let us praise and bless the Savior for this kindness and realize that these virtues must also

be characteristic signs of His representatives and co-workers. Let us ask ourselves how we can practice these virtues.

2) Let us discard the idea that it is the right kind of zeal to stamp as an out-and-out enemy every weak and undecided person who does not side with us or any one who does not defend our state and institution, or who is not interested in the spiritual, religious, or charitable undertakings which are dear to us. This remark applies also to our fellow-priests and fellow-religious. Though the Galileans never openly took Christ's part against the Pharisees, and never really entered into His ideas, He nevertheless treated them as friends.

III. PROPHECIES STILL TO BE FULFILLED. "Till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name the Gentiles shall hope." The Hebrew language, rather poor in words, frequently has to use one and the same word to designate objects which in a way are connected with one another. Thus the word "confession" originally means the act of making something known; it may also mean "praise," which is making the excellence of a person or thing known; or it may designate "a monument," which recalls the excellence; it is used for the excellence itself; finally, it may mean that which is right and correct, that which is the norm for judging, as a doctrine, a law. Hence a clearer translation of the words of the prophet quoted above would be: "Till He establishes the victory

of His doctrine and His law." Here, then, we see one reason why the Savior had to work for the 'stiff-necked people" of Israel and be a failure in Palestine. Had He worked among the Gentiles, He would not have had the opportunity of practicing the four virtues mentioned above, in such a heroic degree. His example would not have been so powerful and the proof for the divine origin of Christianity would not have been as convincing as both are now.

The last sentence may be translated in two ways: "The islands, i. e., the continents separated from Palestine by the vast oceans, will place all their hope and confidence in His person and power," or: "The far-away continents will anxiously await Him and His Church." In these words the prophet not only foretells the world-wide spread of Christ's Kingdom, but also predicts the rejection of Israel. The Evangelist purposely quotes these words. He wishes to make another appeal to his compatriots in order that at least many individual Jews may save themselves by embracing Christianity, even though the nation as such will soon lose its claim to the Messianic graces and the Gentiles will succeed to its honorable position.

Applications. 1) Thus the doctrine of the cross is placed before us even by the prophet. We need to study and re-study it over and over again; for our weak nature will forget it or even rebel against it repeatedly. Only by long and prayerful reflection and by much practice is Christ formed in our minds and hearts.

2) As Christ's failure in Palestine resulted in a much greater ultimate success both on earth and in Heaven, so the coldness and the lack of appreciation which our work often meets with here on earth, will secure for us the everlasting gratitude of the Savior, which counts for more than the love and affection of men on earth.

3) The people delayed their decision between Christ and His enemies and thus not only lost the graces offered by the Messias, but even the privileges which they had thus far enjoyed. Man takes a great risk when he delays to accept the favors God offers him. God, the devil, and the world are not satisfied with half-hearted measures and procrastination. Moreover, the delay produces a dangerous spirit of indifference towards grace, blunts the sense of responsibility, and, to some degree, even the sense of reverence for God and holy things. Let us never think that we may waste some graces offered us in our vocation because we have still many left. The blood of Christ, which clings to every grace, is too precious to let even a drop of it go to waste.

COLLOQUY. Let us thank Christ for His lessons of peaceableness, self-forgetfulness, humility, and readiness to help. Let us resolve never to turn a deaf ear to the divine voice and never deliberately to waste graces. Finally, let us pray for true zeal in striving after perfection. "Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94,8).

Meditation 22

THE ARGUMENTATIVE FORCE OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES

(Matt. 12,22–29)

"Then was offered to Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, so that he spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said: Is not this the Son of David? But the Pharisees hearing it, said: This man casteth not out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils. And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if satan cast out satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. Or how can any one enter into the house of the strong, and rifle his goods, unless he first bind the strong? and then he will rifle his house."

The cure of the blind and mute energumen made the people suspect that Christ was the Messias. As the preternatural character of this miracle was evident, the Pharisees attributed it to the power of the prince of demons. Christ not only refuted this blasphemous accusation, but showed that His power over the demons was

another proof for His Messianic dignity and for their duty of accepting Him and His doctrine.

We pray for the grace of a deep faith.

1. "IS NOT THIS THE SON OF DAVID?" "Then was offered to Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, so that he spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed, and said: Is not this the Son of David?" Some interpreters hold the incident narrated here to be identical with the one described by St. Matthew in a previous chapter (9,34 ff). But though similar in some ways, the two accounts differ in three rather important points: the demoniac of the former occasion is only mute, he of the present pericope is also blind; the people witnessing the former miracle only declare that nothing like this was ever seen in Israel before, while on this occasion they voice their opinion that Jesus may be the Messias; in the previous chapter no refutation by Christ of the blasphemous charge is mentioned, here the accusation is followed by a lengthy rejoinder. Moreover, it is hardly reconcilable with the known brevity of St. Matthew to assume that he reports the same event twice.

In the deliverance of the blind and mute demoniac the self-manifestations of Christ came to a certain climax. A large crowd of people—"multitudes," says the Evangelist—here beheld one of Satan's poorest victims, a man helpless not only against the tortures to which the demon subjected him, but even against his fellowmen and the world around him, groping in perpetual

darkness, unable to communicate with others in any way except by means of clumsy signs, hearing all that was said, but unable to answer except by gestures often unintelligible except to those who were familiar with the meaning of the uncouth movements of his head, hands, and body. By a word from Christ's mouth that sufferer sees and speaks and is freed from the devil. The miraculous nature of this cure was beyond all doubt and dispute; so much so that many persons openly voiced it as their opinion that Christ was the Messias. The cumulative evidence of so many miracles which had preceded this cure, the manifest power exercised over the demons, Christ's own words, all these signs tallied with the description which the prophets had given of "the Son of David." It was very clear that the sentiment of the masses was turning in favor of Christ. All this brought the Pharisees to the verge of despair. Here was a deed the preternatural character of which it was impossible to gainsay; and yet something had to be done, and done quickly too, to counteract the impression this triple miracle had made on the masses. The Pharisees could not deny that a higher power was at work; but they reasoned that, besides those in Heaven, there were also preternatural agents in hell. Why not attribute the wonderful works to Beelzebub? This expedient had helped them before; why not try it again?

And so, with brazen assurance in look and speech, mixed with hypocritical horror and grief that such a crime should have happened before their very eyes, they went around behind the Savior's back and declared to

everybody: "This man casteth not out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." Imagine the horror that must have struck the jubilant masses at hearing this charge coming from their highly revered leaders. They had thought that Jesus might be the Messias; but now those "saintly" men, who knew the truth, warned them: "He has sold his soul to Beelzebub and tries to dupe you with the help of hell."

Applications. 1) How short-lived was the meagre success which the Lord had won by dint of so many miracles extending over the better part of two years. Certainly the people had made progress in knowledge; the question: "Is not this the Son of David?" showed a much deeper insight than the concession made on the former occasion that "never was the like seen in Israel" (Matt. 9,33). But the tender bud of faith was nipped by a killing frost when the Pharisees uttered their blasphemous calumny a second time. Let us learn from the Savior to bear disappointments for God's sake and let us think of Him when our labor is frustrated by the malice of men.

2) If even the Savior did not succeed in convincing people of truths which clashed with their selfish interests, we must not be surprised when in similar cases we have no more success than He. In matters which have more than a mere academic importance, above all in questions of a religious or moral nature, we cannot as a rule have more than what philosophers call "free evidence," that

is to say evidence which really proves, but does not force the intellect to assent and, therefore, leaves room for cavilling. Though reason should always guide the will and feelings, the contrary is often the case. Above all can an evil mind always fabricate subterfuges. It will naturally resort to abuse and cast slurs upon the character of the person who tries to convince it, believing that insults and calumnies uttered against the speaker are a valid refutation of his doctrine. We must expect this kind of treatment and bear it patiently in imitation of the Savior.

II. CHRIST'S REFUTATION. "And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if satan cast out satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." What a scathing rebuke did the Pharisees deserve for their blasphemous calumny, doubly grievous because it was also a sin against the Holy Ghost. The Lord might with full justice have sent the devils into the Pharisees in punishment for their resistance against divine truth, and thus have effectively ruined their reputation and influence. But instead He worked another miracle by showing His omniscience; the Evangelist says significantly: "knowing their thoughts." They did not dare to charge Christ openly to His face, but engaged in "a whispering cam-

paign" against Him. He calmly argued with them by alleging two considerations in order to refute their accusation. First of all He showed how utterly unreasonable the charge was. A spirit as keen and uncannily smart as Beelzebub would never work for the manifest destruction of his own power in this world. He could not fail to see that by assisting Christ in expelling the demons he would but work his own ruin. For while the demons by taking possession of men enlarged the control of their master in this world, and caused many sins, Beelzebub by driving his minions out at the command of Christ would not only materially increase the personal prestige of the Savior, but add weight to His religious and moral teaching, which directly tended to render men submissive to God, make them avoid sin and practice virtue. Christ openly attacked every principle which Lucifer and his minions were trying to spread, and showed himself consistently the most determined antagonist of Satan. Would that wily spirit ever help Him in this war against his dearest interests?

We may remark in passing that this consideration does away with the objection sometimes raised that a higher demon might have assisted Christ in expelling the lower devils for the purpose of deceiving men. That demon could not fail to see that deception in this case, even if it were mere deception, would work against his own ends and aims.

Our Lord illustrated this argument by a comparison, reminding the Pharisees of the effects of civil war on a state and the results of dissension and active opposition

on a city or family. For the Israelites of His day this comparison was all the more telling because they had seen the results of dissension in the civil wars of the preceding century and in the Roman oppression, under which they suffered precisely because they were divided among themselves.

Jesus, moreover, appealed to the case of their own exorcists. We know from St. Mark (9,37), the Acts of the Apostles (19,13), and Flavius Josephus that the Israelites had real exorcists, that is to say, men who had the power to free persons from demoniacal possession by an invocation of God. Christ called these men "your sons." The title "children" or "sons" is repeatedly used in Scripture in the meaning of "disciples." The Savior was referring, therefore, to exorcists who were disciples of the Scribes and Pharisees. His argument runs thus: "You correctly say that your own exorcists expel demons in the power of God. Why do you discriminate between them and Me? I have given you no reason to attribute my exorcisms to Beelzebub, but every reason to ascribe them to a divine power. Therefore, before God and the world your exorcists will prove you guilty of an insane libel and condemn you for a blasphemous calumny."

Applications. 1) Let us admire and praise the meekness of the Lord and make an act of atonement for the horrible offence He suffers here. Let us call to mind how often the offence of the Pharisees is repeated in our times, in a manner corresponding to the refined and, in a

way, more emasculated infidelity of modern civilization, by a more clumsy, more conceited and contemptuous denial of the facts recorded in the Scriptures or by an appeal to a false psychology. The Beelzebub of many modern rationalists is the "unconscious," the Freudian "censor," or the unknown forces of nature which will be discovered in the course of time. The Beelzebub of the Modernists is "Vital Immanence," which conjures up a poetic Christ about whom we cannot have any historical knowledge. The Beelzebub of others is the nebulous colossus of the nineteen centuries which separate us from the real Christ and are said to prevent certain and definite information about Him.

2) Our Lord teaches us here by His example how and when we must protect our good name and refute aspersions made on it. There are chiefly three occasions which demand such a refutation: namely, when God's glory directly suffers from the calumny or the suspicion raised against us; when well-meaning people are scandalized; and when we otherwise would suffer a great spiritual loss or become incapacitated for the work of our vocation. But these three cases presuppose that an effective refutation can be made without doing greater harm; otherwise humility demands that we bear the calumny in silence. The manner of refuting it must be calm, objective, and brief.

III. "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME UPON YOU." "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the king-

dom of God come upon you. Or how can any one enter into the house of the strong, and rifle his goods, unless he first bind the strong? and then he will rifle his house." The Lord in the preceding words proved that He did not expel devils with the help of higher demons. Hence for every one who believed in the Old Testament revelation it was evident that He did so with the help of God, or, as He said, "in the Spirit of God." But then another important conclusion could not be avoided, namely, that the Kingdom of God was no longer a thing of the future, but a living reality among men. For the Spirit, by the assistance He gave the man Christ, testified to the truth of the latter's doctrine, the burden of which was: "The kingdom of God is at hand." Moreover, it was the teaching of the Rabbis that frequent exorcisms would be a sign of the Messias and His Kingdom.

Christ next showed the necessity of this conclusion by considering the nature of the case in question. Using a comparison, He said that when somebody entered and rifled the house of a strong man in the very presence of the latter, this was a proof that he had overpowered and fettered the owner. Now the Savior was openly entering Satan's house, this earth, which the devil considered his own in consequence of the control he had gained through Adam's sin, and he was depriving Satan of his treasures, the bodies and souls of men. Therefore, He had robbed him of his power to defend his property, in other words, He had deprived him of the absolute control he had had in this world until then.

Even the behavior of the demons in Christ's presence

showed this; for at His very approach they manifested great fear and they always had to yield an instantaneous, though unwilling, obedience to His commands. Nor must we overlook the fact that Christ systematically and consistently attacked Satan's kingdom, expelling demons whenever He met a possessed person. Exorcisms formed an essential part of His work just as well as preaching and healing, so much so that not only He Himself performed them on every possible occasion, but gave the same power to His Apostles and disciples for their first mission in Galilee.

But all this proved that the Kingdom of God was being re-established in this world. For after Adam's fall the destruction of Satan's dominion and the re-establishment of God's Kingdom are practically one and the same thing.

Therefore, the Kingdom of God was now in Israel's midst, "come upon you," as He said. If its outward form did not tally with the expectations of the Pharisees, it was nevertheless their bounden duty to swallow their disappointment and accept it just as it presented itself. They ought to have rejoiced at the chance to free themselves for good from the tyrannical rule of Satan and seek peace and safety in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Applications. 1) Since Christ has freed us from the yoke of Satan, it must be our care to guard against having this yoke forced upon our necks again by our yielding to the promptings of our evil passions. For the slavery of our evil passions is worse than that of de-

moniacal possession, because the latter can control only the body, whereas the former does violence to our free will, which is more fatal.

2) The proof for the divinity of Christ and the divine origin of the Church which is drawn from the control over the forces of hell, has not ended with the Savior's death; it is one of the constant manifestations of the power residing in Christ's Church. Not to mention the rather infrequent cases of public exorcisms and the disappearance of demoniacal infestations wherever the Church gets a foothold, she triumphs over Beelzebub and his hordes in all persecutions; she successfully overcomes the allurements of Satan by the sanctity of so many of her members; she gains many a conquest by great fertility in all that is good and noble and charitable amidst the wickedness, vileness, and uncharitableness of the world. She alone has unity in faith, thus mastering the spirits of error and untruth; she alone can and does effectively stem the tide of immorality, safeguarding the sanctity and inviolability of the marriage-tie and showing herself immovable in her denial of unlawful concessions to the passion which is sapping the home and society. The realization of all these blessings must fill us with deep gratitude and impel us to do our share toward the propagation of the Kingdom of God, which "is come upon us."

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for having been delivered by Christ from the slavery of the devil and called

to the true faith and to a privileged position in God's Kingdom. Acts of faith in the divinity of Christ and the true Church. Petition for grace not to relapse into the slavery of the devil. Oblation to Christ. The Apostles' Creed.

Meditation 23

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST

(Matt. 12,30–37)

"He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth. Therefore I say to you: Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world, nor in the world to come. Either make the tree good and its fruit good: or make the tree evil, and its fruit evil. For by the fruit the tree is known. O generation of vipers, how can you speak good things, whereas you are evil? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Continuing His reply to the calumny spread against Him that He cast out devils with the aid of Beelzebub, the Savior in the words just quoted accuses the Pharisees of flagrantly violating their duty of leading the common people to their Messias, and of committing a sin which will never be forgiven, of making a statement which will seal their doom. He publicly declares that they are thoroughly and hopelessly perverse.

We entreat the grace to be careful in speech and to be faithful to the duty of leading souls to God.

I. THE SIN OF THE PHARISEES.

A. A VIOLATION OF A SACRED DUTY. "He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." The charge of the Pharisees that Christ expelled demons with the aid of Beelzebub contained not only the malice of blasphemy, but two other elements of moral turpitude, which the Savior explained in the words just cited. For a proper understanding of the pericope which forms the subject of this meditation, it is necessary to bear in mind that Christ was directly addressing the Pharisees only, not the common people, who formed the greater part of the audience present; and that for about three years He had stood before all Israel as the Messias, fully confirmed as such by divine testimony.

The prophets of the Old Testament (cf. Ezechiel 34,12ff.) and John the Baptist (Matt. 3,12) had represented the coming Redeemer as the one who would again gather Israel, the flock of Yahweh, which had been dis-

persed through the fault of faithless shepherds. It was a sacred duty for all members of the chosen people, as it is a strict obligation for all men, to let themselves be brought by Christ into the fold of God, into the Kingdom which He had come to establish. They owed their Messias unreserved loyalty and full obedience; therefore, even mere neutrality, a deliberate standing aloof instead of joining Him, was real disloyalty, an act of injustice, opposition and implicit enmity. For this reason He said: "He that is not with me, is against me."

Moreover, on account of their leading position in the nation, the Pharisees were strictly bound not only to accept Christ and His doctrine for themselves, but to bring the people to Him. This sacred obligation they violated not only by the bad example they gave in their refusal to become members of His Kingdom, but still more flagrantly by their consistent and active opposition to Him, by the calumnies they spread against Him, and most of all by their terrible accusation that He worked miracles with the aid of Beelzebub. They not only prevented the people from approaching Christ, but positively drove them away from Him. For this reason Christ continued: "And he that gathereth not with me, scattereth" [the people], he chases the sheep already dispersed still farther apart and makes it impossible for the shepherd to collect his flock; he drives the poor sheep into greater misery, confuses them all the more, makes it doubly certain that they will either perish from hunger and thirst or be torn to pieces by wild beasts. How true was this terrible accusation!

Applications. 1) It will always remain true that neutrality towards Christ is impossible. Let us, therefore, give ourselves entirely to Him. A lukewarm Catholic, a tepid priest, and a tepid religious cannot help being Christ's enemies. Let us never forget the words which Christ in the Apocalypse addressed to the bishop of Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold, nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Ap. 3,15–16).

2) It will also remain forever true that every one "that gathereth not with Christ, scattereth." But we gather with Christ only if we let ourselves be directed in our undertakings by the Church and conscientiously obey the directions of the ecclesiastical law and our Superiors. An enterprise and a method of working may seem ever so holy and efficacious, but they will be useless or even harmful if they are contrary to the rule.

B. THE SIN WHICH WILL NOT BE FORGIVEN. "Therefore I say to you: Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come." If we wish not to draw wrong conclusions from these words, we must carefully consider not only the text, but the context, and strictly adhere to Christ's

declarations. He says that every sin and every blasphemy will be forgiven, even blasphemies against the Son of Man—except one, "the blasphemy of the Spirit." What is this "blasphemy of the Spirit" or this "speaking against the Holy Ghost"? What the context suggests becomes very clear from the parallel text of St. Mark: "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, shall never have forgiveness, but shall be guilty of an everlasting sin; BECAUSE THEY SAID: HE HATH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT" (Mark. 3,29–30). Christ, therefore, does not speak of every blasphemy uttered against the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, but of that blasphemy by which evidently divine miracles like the exorcisms of Christ are maliciously attributed to the devil. An essential element of this sin is the deliberate malice with which, despite better knowledge or at least despite serious doubts, evident works of God are declared to be achievements of the evil spirit. This is clear also from a consideration of those blasphemies which, according to the Lord's word, will be forgiven. He says that blasphemies uttered against the Son of Man will be pardoned. Why? The Son of Man was "like us in everything, sin only excepted." His humble appearance, His seeming weakness, the constant persecutions to which He was subjected and before which He retreated, are apt to overshadow His holiness, His supernatural wisdom and, therefore, the denial of His divinity can, at least to some extent, be excused. But brazenly to attribute an evident work of God to the devil, in spite of better knowledge, means to identify God with Satan.

However, St. Mark gives as the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost not a mere thought, but the open and, we might call it, the magisterial declaration of the Pharisees about the authorship of Christ's miracles; it is the attempt to make others accept this blasphemy as an honest truth.

But why does Christ call this sin "blaspheming against the Holy Ghost"? Because miracles are signs of God's greatest love and the completion of revelation, and all divine works of this kind are "appropriated" to the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the Savior speaks neither of the denial of the divinity of the Third Person nor of all the so-called six sins against the Holy Ghost, namely, despair of God's grace and mercy, impugning the known truth, sinning from presumptuous confidence in the divine mercy, jealousy against another on account of the graces he receives from God, impenitence, obduracy; He speaks only of one sin, that of maliciously attributing God's manifest miracles to the devil. This crime is the result of a diabolical perversion and inflicts an almost unspeakable disgrace on God. One guilty of this sin will, according to Christ's words, never be forgiven, neither in this life nor in the next.

Applications. 1) Though the Savior's words may sound harsh, they nevertheless contain a consoling element, in as much as they manifest a really wonderful mercy. God is ready to forgive all offences, even the galling imputations against the character of His Son, the attempts made on the Savior's life, every species of

ingratitude. Christ really searches for reasons to excuse wilful, ungrateful man. He will go to the full length of this mercy when on the cross He will offer an excuse for His murderers. What love and what confidence can be too great on our part?

2) The theologians find in these words also a proof for the existence of Purgatory. Man often enough dies before all his venial sins are forgiven. But then he obtains pardon by the contrition he feels for them as soon as he sees their malice in the light of eternity, and by the expiatory punishments he suffers in the other world.

C. THE REASON WHY THIS SIN IS NOT FORGIVEN. The Savior does not say that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost *cannot,* but only that it *will not* be pardoned. He and His Church have the power to forgive all sins, but only on condition that the sinner repents of them. But he who commits this sin is firmly resolved not to repent; his, as St. Mark says, "is an everlasting sin" (Mark 3,29). This expression, a comparison of this crime with the sins which, according to Christ's assertion, can and will be forgiven, and the remarks about the character and disposition of the Pharisees, which we shall consider presently, point out the reason for this life-long resolution of never repenting, namely, wilful, deliberate obduracy in malicious calumny, in spite of better knowledge. This diabolical perversion has two causes. The first and positive cause is the sinner's malicious will. Only diabolical hatred and contempt of God

can stamp a work which is manifestly divine as the work of the devil. There is here no question of a mere intellectual error. The theologians and interpreters of Scripture insist that one who commits this sin has at least moral certitude about the divine origin of the miracle; for all authorities speak about the wonders that are clearly and palpably due to God. The best illustration which modern times offer of this sin, we find perhaps in the horrible blasphemies which certain lecturers and writers utter against the accounts of the Bible. For only an infernal hatred of God can prompt men not to be satisfied with harboring these ideas in their own minds, but to give public utterance to them and thus fill others with the same hatred.

The second and more negative cause is the divine decree not to grant these scoffers the extraordinary graces which alone could effect their conversion. Among these favors we must count not only those veritable miracles of the moral order which consist in most extraordinary lights for the mind and most powerful inspirations for the heart, which alone can break that diabolical hatred and proud infidelity, but also preservation from a sudden death, which, as history proves, frequently overtakes those who make it their business to spread heresies and infidelity, and protection from diabolical infestations, to which this sin renders them particularly liable.

Thus, then, theirs becomes "an everlasting sin," deliberately chosen and persevered in. They do not want to be forgiven and, therefore, they will not be forgiven.

A very reliable commentator adds the apposite remark that the very desire to be forgiven and the fear of not obtaining the divine pardon are proofs of one's not being guilty of the sin of which Christ speaks.

Application. It would seem that only those who have enjoyed particular graces of God and have then fallen from this high estate, are capable of this sin. Those who through their own fault lose the grace of their sacerdotal or religious vocation are apt not only to suffer shipwreck in their faith, but losing also all sense of decency, to come finally to be filled with a truly diabolical pride and hatred against God and revelation. Let us remain firmly convinced that the loss of our vocation would be the greatest calamity that could befall us. Let us pray daily for the grace of perseverance and carefully avoid every danger. And if one should fall into mortal sin, let him cleanse his soul from it by confession the same day.

II. THE REASON FOR THIS SIN. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good: or make the tree evil, and its fruit evil. For by the fruit the tree is known. O generation of vipers, how can you speak good things, whereas you are evil? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." To get the full meaning of these words let us paraphrase them and express in plain language the ideas which Christ, accord-

ing to the custom of the Orientals, insinuates by comparisons. He continues His address to the Pharisees and states that one must not be surprised at their uttering such blasphemies because they are rotten to the core. Bad by descent and training as well as by their own free choice, they cannot utter good words, but only evil ones. "Be consistent," He says; "you cannot call a tree good and its fruit bad nor a tree bad and its fruit good; for the fruit manifests the nature of the tree. Freeing a person from diabolical possession is a good fruit; therefore, it cannot be the work of the evil spirit. Nobody need be surprised that you utter such blasphemies; for you are like the spawn of insidious poisonous vipers, the bad descendants and successors of bad ancestors and predecessors, and for this reason it is impossible for you to say anything that is not evil. The charge you make against Me is not dictated by a sudden burst of passion, but is the result of malice deeply rooted in your hearts. You are even more wicked than your accusation implies; for your words are but the overflow of the malice which is in you; for speaking is like taking some things out of one's treasury, not like emptying it altogether. A man's words reveal the nature of his mind. The good speech reveals the good man and evil words betray the wicked soul."

Such is the terrible accusation which Jesus, the Eternal Truth, hurls at the Pharisees in the presence of a multitude of people, not for the purpose of giving vent to His well-founded indignation, but in order to break the baneful influence which they exert over simple folk.

He answers their charge against Him with a countercharge, but there is a vast difference between the two. They accuse without proving, He accuses and substantiates His charges. And when He calls them "the spawn of vipers," He can point not only to the systematic campaign of lies and calumnies which they have been keeping up against Him and the Baptist, but also to their past history; for they are the descendants of those who maligned and murdered the prophets (cf. Matt. 23,27–31.37).

Applications. 1) If the Lord, though meek and humble on earth, here and on other occasions uttered such a crushing condemnation against the Pharisees because they ruined souls, what must be the verdict which, as Judge, He will pronounce upon those who are guilty of similar sins? Examining the gospels we find that He is most severe when there is a question of scandal; and scandal is the sin which demands the greatest watchfulness from priests, educators, and superiors.

2) The Lord here teaches us also how we are to break the bad influence of lecturers and publications that ruin souls. While being careful in our words, we must uncover their malice without sparing them; for speakers and writers of this type are, as a rule, persons upon whom nothing will make an impression but a merciless revelation of their corrupt nature.

III. THE IMPENDING JUDGMENT. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they

shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." The Pharisees posed as the supreme judges of Christ and His actions. But the Savior now foretold that the day would come on which the would-be judges would be forced into the position of the accused, and sentenced according to the full rigor of justice. He said: "But I say to you." Whenever He uses this phrase, He not only is about to utter an important truth, but wants to emphasize His words by an appeal to His infinite knowledge and veracity. The next words are interpreted in two ways. St. Chrysostom explains the "idle word" as the lying, slanderous, shameless, immoral, godless statement and says that the Lord directly refers to the blasphemy of the Pharisees, declaring that it will be dealt with according to the rigor of the law. According to the more common interpretation, Christ's assurance is even more emphatic; for the expression used in the Greek text designates the empty, useless, frivolous word and the argumentation of the Lord amounts to this: "If even every word that serves no good purpose will have to be accounted for, how terrible a verdict will be passed on your blasphemous calumny."

The reason for this severe judgment He has given in the preceding verses. Good words show forth the good man who has gathered a treasure of goodness in his heart; but bad words manifest the wickedness of the soul and idle words betray a heart that is empty, frivolous, lacking in seriousness. It is the heart, i. e., the will

or intention, which makes us good or bad. Even more or less indeliberate words, if habitually uttered, show the character of the speaker. With God no deception is possible; He hears our words and records them as evidence for the last day. Men may draw false conclusions from people's conversations, God never.

Applications. 1) Christ's words contain a serious warning for us to watch our speech and to avoid "idle" words. His caution ought to make us circumspect, but not scrupulous. Idle words are those which serve no proper purpose. Proper is that purpose which directly promotes the glory of God, our own and our neighbor's salvation and, also, anything which is conducive to this end, such as charity, innocent diversion, necessary recreation. Idle is everything which is opposed, or at least not conducive, to this end. Hence the sinfulness of words arises either from the topic discussed or from the circumstances under which we utter them. Untruthful, uncharitable, slanderous, rebellious talk, the violation of a secret, the imparting of harmful or imprudent information, a conversation about a topic not befitting one's state, fall under the first class. Among the circumstances which render words "idle" we may mention the time, the place, the purpose, the consequences for the speaker and listener, the existence of special regulations for certain persons. Among the consequences we must above all mention dissipation of mind, a spirit of levity, scandal. It will be profitable here to examine ourselves

on these points and pay special attention to them in our daily examination of conscience.

2) It is certainly a very good axiom that one must not take every word one hears too seriously; for due allowance must be made for human frailty, for excitement, for want of attention, and for numerous other influences which change and modify the moral nature of men's words, and also for one's own mental limitations. Only God sees the heart of man and can put the proper estimation on all that is said. Only He is able "to justify us by our words and to condemn us by our words." Christ makes words the norm of the divine, not of the human judgment.

COLLOQUY. Acts of atonement for the blasphemies Christ and the Holy Ghost have to suffer; of contrition for our sins committed in speech; of petition for the grace to guard our tongue. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: and a door round about my lips. Incline not my heart to evil words; to make excuses in sins" (Ps. 140,3–4).

Meditation 24

THE DEMAND FOR A SIGN

(Matt. 12,38–42)

"Then some of the Scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying: Master, we would see a sign from Thee. Who an-

swering said to them: An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign: and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and nights. The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas. And behold a greater than Jonas here. The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon here."

In these words the Evangelist characterizes another class of those who rejected Christ's message, the shallow and light-minded men for whom the Savior was no more than an interesting performer and His miracles merely a welcome diversion. They approached Him with the demand to perform a startling phenomenon on earth or in the sky. But the Lord replied that the only sign which would be given them was that of Jonas, by which He understood His death and resurrection with their accompanying phenomena, and He told them further that at the last judgment they would be put to shame by the Ninivites and the queen of the south who came to see and hear Solomon.

Let us beg for the grace always to treat the affairs of the soul with proper seriousness.

I. THE FRIVOLOUS DEMAND. "Then some of the Scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying: Master,

we would see a sign from Thee." St. Matthew in two places (12,38ff. and 16,1ff.) relates that the Jews asked Christ to give them "a sign," a startling phenomenon, as proof of the dignity which He claimed, and were told that the only "sign" they would receive was that of His death and resurrection. Some interpreters are of the opinion that the Evangelist twice refers to the same fact; but since the two accounts, though similar in many points, nevertheless exhibit differences, and since this assumption is difficult to reconcile with the succinctness which the sacred author manifests throughout his work, we hold with many interpreters that he reports two distinct facts. The one which forms the subject of this meditation is also narrated by St. Luke (11, 9ff.) and seems to have occurred in Judea during the last year of Christ's life on earth, between the feast of the Tabernacles and that of the Dedication of the Temple, while the other, which is also mentioned by St. Mark (8,11ff.), took place at Magedan in Galilee, some time between the third Pasch and the feast of the Tabernacles. The Evangelist again chooses not to follow the chronological order, with a view to bring out his idea more clearly.

This demand must have been made shortly after the events mentioned in the preceding verses. The particle "then" here means, as frequently in other places: "sometime before or after the event spoken of in the preceding paragraphs." When the sacred author next writes that the Pharisees and Scribes "answered him," we must bear in mind that he uses this expression not only to des-

ignate the reply to a question asked just before, but also to denote the reaction which the words or deeds of somebody have on another. It would seem that St. Matthew here wishes to convey the idea that the enemies of Jesus, realizing the effect which Christ's miracles were beginning to produce among the common people, had thought of a method by which to counteract the favorable impression and had made their demand with this purpose in view.

St. Luke, moreover, tells us that "multitudes were running together," either attracted by the sight of the Pharisees and Scribes approaching Christ in an unusually solemn manner, or perhaps purposely invited by the Pharisees to witness the occurrence. Those inveterate enemies of the Savior seem to have acted on a preconcerted plan. They demanded, as the third evangelist tells us, "a sign from heaven" (Luke 11,16), flashes of lightning and claps of thunder, fire dropping out of a clear sky or a similar phenomenon, as St. Jerome remarks. They concealed their dark purpose under a friendly and even reverential exterior, wording their wish as politely as the direct and natural phraseology of those days could put it: "Master, we would see a sign from Thee." They pretended to be willing to believe in Him if He gratified their desire.

But what did their request amount to in reality? They wanted the Savior to treat them to a thrilling or hair-raising show; they attempted to degrade Him to the low level of the magician or conjurer. For while it is true that God at times makes His majesty and power

known by extraordinary and frightening phenomena of nature, He never does so at the request of curious sightseers.

Moreover, had Christ not worked miracles enough during the three years He had been before the public? Had He not performed miracles much greater than a sign in the heavens? Again, would not the Scribes and Pharisees have attributed such a sign to the demons, just as they did His other miracles? And finally, these theologians of the Old Testament sadly mistook their position when they attempted to dictate to God what kind of miracles He should perform in order to secure their gracious acceptance of His revelation. Supernatural revelations are favors for the acceptance of which man may not lay down conditions; he must simply submit to the divine majesty.

Applications. 1) The demand of the Pharisees is repeated by those shallow and frivolous worldlings who make sport of religion, who are not averse to an occasional religious shudder of awe as a pleasurable diversion, but who at the next moment turn everything holy into a joke. This spirit is promoted by our daily press, which, craving for "news," treats everything, whether profane or sacred, divine or diabolical, holy or criminal, merely as "a good story." Our duty with regard to this matter consists in rendering atonement for the insult thus offered to God and in opening the eyes of our people to the baseness of this attitude towards sacred objects.

2) Persons devoted to a spiritual life sometimes are in danger, not of becoming frivolous in religious matters, but too curious. They want to read only books which satisfy curiosity and seek in their prayers merely spiritual enjoyment. Their condition is still worse if they waste much time in the perusal of light literature, or of numerous daily, weekly, and monthly publications which cater only to the shallow taste of the masses.

II. CHRIST'S ANSWER. "Who answering said to them: An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign: and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights."

A. AN ADULTEROUS GENERATION. Christ answered the Scribes and Pharisees in a manner which they did not expect. He characterized their demand as that of men who had become traitors to the most sacred obligation incumbent on them by virtue of the covenant made at Mount Sinai. That pact is represented in the Old Testament as a holy espousal and the violation of the duties it imposed, as adultery. Now the first and foremost obligations of the Sinaitic covenant were belief in Yahweh and all His revelations and acceptance of the Messias. But these two obligations Israel in general and, in particular, they who now demanded a sign as condition for their acceptance of the revelations which Yahweh was making through Christ, were violating most grievously. Breaking their oath of fidelity towards God,

they were entertaining sinful relations with Satan, as their fathers had done before them, and thus deserved to be styled, not merely adulterers, but "an adulterous generation."

Application. Let us not dwell on these words of the Savior merely for the purpose of casting stones upon Israel, but let us rather ask ourselves whether we, on a smaller scale, do not imitate its example, we who are bound to the Savior by the ties of holy vows and special duties. Let us examine ourselves how we observe our vows and fulfill the duties of our state, trying to get a deeper insight into our faults and failings, seeing how we can amend them. Let us ask Christ's pardon for our shortcomings, thank Him for His loving patience, and solicit His powerful help for the future.

B. ONLY ONE SIGN STILL GRANTED. Christ's words were appalling. He refused not only to accede to their insolent demand for a sign in the heavens, but to give them any further sign during His earthly life, except one only, His death and resurrection, which were to be the beginning of the judgment which awaited the Jewish nation. Did He refuse to work further miracles? Not so, but from now on He would work fewer miracles, and these only when requested. He declared, moreover, that in these miracles He no longer intended to benefit the nation and its infidel leaders. Whilst He was willing to employ His omnipotence for the benefit of those in need when they approached Him with due respect, He

now excommunicated these frivolous men. Only one thing more will He do with regard to them. He will stop their mockery when they utter their blasphemous jibes against Him on the cross, by a sign which will throw them into a veritable panic, namely, by the darkness which will spread over the entire land. And when they pick up courage again, He shall silence them a second time by other most unwelcome signs, such as the trembling of the earth, the rending of the veil of the Temple, the rising of the dead and their walking into the City both on the day of His death and that of His resurrection. He shall complete this sign by His own resurrection. What a terrifying impression this sign made on the Jewish leaders, the Evangelist faithfully records in its proper place.

Application. How terrible it is to be told by Christ that He will have nothing more to do with any one, but to confound and to condemn him. But whom does He mean? Leaders in religious life, who not only have lost the proper spirit, but insult Him by their frivolous demand, men who in their pride imagine that they can prescribe conditions to a divine messenger. That sin is repeated by those priests and religious who in their conceit think that they can lay down to their Superiors conditions and stipulations on which they want to make the fulfilment of their duties depend. God always resists such proud minds, and their fall is terrible. Let us beware of ever becoming guilty of this sin.

C. THE SIGN OF JONAS. The explanation which the Savior gave of this sign calls for some exegetical remarks. As the Savior died on Friday afternoon about three o'clock, and arose before the dawn of Sunday, according to our modern way of reckoning only one full night, a good part of a second night, and one full day and some hours of a second day elapsed between His death and His resurrection. And yet, He spoke of three days and three nights. The Jews, however, in computing the days, considered any part of the twenty-four hours as a full day. Hence, according to their way of reckoning, Christ really was "in the heart of the earth" for three days, namely, the hours of Friday which remained after His demise, Saturday, and the hours of Sunday which preceded His resurrection. Moreover, the Jews began the day not at midnight, but at about six in the evening. But even so we do not get three nights; for according to the Jewish reckoning, when night set in on what we call Friday, it was already Saturday. But here we must bear in mind that the Greek expression for a period of twenty-four hours at that time, was not the simple word "day," but *"Nychthhemeron,"* literally "night-day." Now it is evident that Christ really was "in the heart of the earth" for three such "night-days" according to the Jewish reckoning.

"In the heart of the earth." Many of the best commentators do not take this phrase to be a reference to the grave in which Jesus was buried, for the very plausible reason that His grave, cut out as it was in a rock

above the surface and, therefore, above ground, can hardly be styled "the heart of the earth." They say that Christ spoke of His stay in "Abraham's bosom," or the "Limbo of the Fathers," of which the Creed speaks when it says: "He descended into hell."

Wherein, then, did the sign consist which the Scribes and Pharisees were to receive? In the points in which it bears a resemblance to the rescue of Jonas. Jonas was thrown into the sea to save the boat and its inmates. He remained for three "night-days" unharmed in the belly of the whale, was rescued in a miraculous manner, and finally announced to the Ninivites their impending doom. As Jonas was cast out of the boat in order that the rest of the navigators might be saved, so Christ would be condemned to death in order that the Romans might not destroy the Jewish nation. As the former remained three days unhurt in the sea-monster, so Jesus would tarry three days in the realm of the dead in perfect safety. As the prophet after three days was brought back to land, so the Savior after three days would rise in glory. And, finally, as Jonas had to warn the people of Ninive of the approaching destruction of their city, so Christ's resurrection was to be an announcement of the doom of the Jewish nation and of the city of Jerusalem.

Application. The Scribes tried to lower the Savior to the level of a public performer, but He in His reply rose to the dignity of Divine Judge and forced them into the degrading position of criminals about to be sentenced.

Here we have one of the comparatively few instances in which He manifested Himself as the Supreme Judge. An examination of all the instances of this kind recorded in the gospels will show that they are all called forth by the frivolousness or hypocrisy of His enemies. Christ demands seriousness and sincerity of everybody. We may have all confidence in Him, provided we take the affairs of our soul seriously and treat Him with candor and sincerity.

III. THE NINIVITES AND THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH.

"The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas. And behold a greater than Jonas here. The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon here." In these words Christ foretold another feature of the punishment which would overtake the frivolous mockers. The Jews considered the inhabitants of the eastern cities, Babylon and Ninive, to have been among the most abject sinners. Now Christ told them that, at the last judgment, they themselves would not only be placed on the same level with the despised Gentiles, but would be put to shame by those whom they had scorned. Before the entire world they would have to suffer being compared with the people of Ninive, and all mankind would see how those pagans had listened to the preaching of a mere man, whose words had been

unsupported by miracles, and had done severe penance, while the Jews had not only rejected, but made sport of, one who had confirmed His preaching with a host of wonderful deeds. They would also have to face "the queen of the south," who upon a mere report had unhesitatingly undergone all the hardships of a long journey from the extreme ends of the then known world to witness Solomon's wisdom in person; whereas the Pharisees had had in their midst Him of whom Solomon was but a faint type, who for years had gone after them instead of making them undertake journeys to see and hear Him, and who, instead of a few crumbs of mere human wisdom, had offered them the superabundance of divine truth.

Christ's words were not only severe, but also inexpressibly pathetic: "Behold, a greater than Jonas," "behold a greater than Solomon." But it was all in vain.

Applications. 1) Let us make acts of atonement to the outraged dignity of our divine Lord. The offence of the mockers is repeated in our day by those who, though calling themselves Christians, are blinded by a false psychology and treat the miracles and mystic gifts vouchsafed to members of the Church in our time as interesting psychic phenomena, and by those who dabble in Spiritistic experiments. The ouija-board, the mediumistic performances, spiritistic séances, the pranks of fortune-tellers and clairvoyants, are for them means to satisfy their prurient desire for "signs in the heavens."

Let us not forget that the Church of late years has taken a very determined stand against dabbling in these matters, forbidding even passive attendance at such exhibitions.

2) The words of Christ contain also a serious warning to listen to and follow the inspirations which we priests and religious receive in greater abundance than the people in the world, lest they, by their fidelity in the use of the fewer graces granted to them, rise in judgment against us.

COLLOQUY. Acts of adoration, atonement, and oblation to Christ. Petition that we may not receive the grace of God in vain and thus ruin our own souls and the souls of others. "Who shall resist the strength of thy arm? For the whole world before thee is as the least grain in the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew, that falleth down upon the earth" (Wis. 11,22.23).

Meditation 25

THE HALF-HEARTED

(Matt. 12,43–45)

"And when an unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith: I will return into my house from whence I came out. And coming he findeth it empty, swept and gar-

nished. Then he goeth, and taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is made worse than the first. So shall it be also to this wicked generation."

Since the people still remained undecided between Christ and their leaders, the Lord now foretold what would happen to them if they delayed their decision any longer. They had been rescued once again from the tyranny of the evil spirit through the work of Christ, preceded by that of the Baptist, and to be followed by that of the Apostles. But this was to be the last time that God would offer them the chance for true freedom; if they did not accept it now, they would not only relapse into their former misery without hope of being helped out of it again, but their misery would be seven times as great as before. The parable in which He clothed His warning demands a careful study lest it be misunderstood.

Let us entreat the grace to guard against half-heartedness in the service of God and in the use of the graces He offers.

I. THE DANGER THREATENING ISRAEL. A. THE EVIL SPIRIT ANXIOUS TO RETURN. "And when an unclean spirit is gone out of a man he walketh through dry places seeking rest, and findeth none." The unclean spirit of whom the Lord speaks, is not the spirit who tempts men to sins of the flesh, but the spirit who is stained with the sin of rebellion against God and is the

very opposite of God, who is infinite purity. The devil is frequently designated by this appellation.

Like the rest of mankind, the people of Israel had fallen under the dominion of Satan. The Lord now compared their condition to that of a man whose house has been occupied by an intruder, who not only makes free with the place and all its appurtenances, but reduces the lawful owner to a state of abject slavery in his own home. In the days preceding the Babylonian captivity the devil held possession of the house of Israel by arousing in the people a strange hankering for idolatrous practices, from which only seventy long years of captivity and slavery in a strange land and under the mastery of idolaters could free them. After the return to Palestine the devil again took forceful possession of the people by means of Pharisaism and Sadduceeism, which, killing all genuine religiousness and rendering the common folk subject to all the harsh regulations and exactions of their leaders, could result only in the moral ruin of the nation. God had expelled the demoniacal intruder in the days of yore by the misery the people suffered on the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris; but now He was driving him out by the gentleness and the elevating teachings of Christ, the warnings of the Baptist, and the work of the Apostles. But the people could not make up their minds to welcome this liberation and secure their freedom forever by accepting the Savior and His message. Therefore, Jesus now warned them that Satan, though driven away, would try to regain possession of their house. He compared the devil to an intruder, who,

after being forced out of the home which he has occupied by sheer force and injustice, has to wander about in a houseless and waterless desert, subject to all the inclemencies of the weather and tortured by a burning thirst. The comparison was much better understood by the Palestinians than by us; for they lived in a country which has comparatively few rivers, brooks and wells. Indeed, their common expression for a delightful country was "a well-watered land," while they designated an uninhabitable place as a "desert without water." As a man cast out of a comfortable home near a well of deliciously fresh water would feel all the privations much more keenly, and, being constantly mindful of his former comfort, would be very anxious to establish himself again in that house, so, according to Christ's words, the devil, after losing his control over Israel through the work of the Baptist, Christ, and His Apostles, could not but be tortured by a violent desire to re-establish his dominion over Israel as a whole and over the individual members of the nation in particular. His hatred against God and men was like the burning thirst of a man cast out into the waterless desert.

Application. Though Christ's words had direct reference only to the people of Israel, to whom He was speaking, they are true at all times and of every soul that has been liberated from the yoke of evil passions. Therefore, we must never think that an initial victory has driven the enemy of souls away for good and has killed all his desires for reducing it again to his tyrannical sway.

His hatred tortures him more cruelly than the heat, cold, and burning thirst could torment the man in the parable. Every defeat he suffers only fans this hatred the more. Our own spiritual life and all our work for souls will always remain a "wrestling against the spirits of wickedness" (Eph. 6,12).

B. THE DEVIL NOTHING DAUNTED. "Then he saith: I will return into my house from whence I came out." In these words Christ wants to bring out some characteristic features of the attempts the devil makes in order to regain control over a soul. "I will return into my house." He represents the unclean spirit as uttering those words, in order to warn all that the devil treats a soul which has once been under his dominion as though it still belonged to him, as though it still retained its inclination to the sins to which it formerly was a slave, or as though its conversion were not sincere, but the result of an unwelcome compulsion.

Equally significant are the next words Christ puts into the mouth of the evil spirit: "from whence I came out." Commentators remark that the Lord here describes the devil as acting in a way to suggest that he had left the house of his own free choice and had not been expelled by force and against his will. Jesus could not characterize the brazen insolence of the tempter more graphically. The conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees in the days of the Savior furnished an apt illustration. Neither the forceful words of the Baptist nor all the sermons and miracles of Christ could ever make them put off

the mask of self-assurance or acknowledge their defeat. They used the Savior's words only for new attacks and re-doubled their efforts to render their rule over the people more despotic.

Application. One who is not well versed in the spiritual life is often surprised to find that, after his conversion to a better life, the same passions are again stirred up in his soul, nay, that he suffers even more severe temptations. Hence, he is inclined to fear that his resolutions were not sincere. And yet, he has changed for the better; he is not the same he was before. It is only the devil and perhaps his former evil companions who have not changed. They still act as though he belonged to them. The devil realizes his defeat, but he does not want to acknowledge it. He knows that if he wishes to regain his control and succeed in his attacks, he must put on a bold appearance. One of his most efficacious means to succeed in tempting back again one over whom he has lost control, is to make his victim lose confidence and feel like a degraded slave of passion.

II. THE INCAUTIOUS MAN. "And coming he findeth it [the house] empty, swept and garnished." Christ had broken the power of Satan; but now Israel had to do its part by freely and resolutely accepting the Savior and His message. The work of salvation always demands man's free co-operation. The Messias was not permitted to do more than free the house from the tyrannical intruder. If the owner really wanted to protect himself and

his home against a new invasion, he had to invite the liberator to stay with him. That liberator merely begged for admission; He would never force Himself upon the owner nor remain in his house unbidden. But alas, Israel was not ready to invite Him to stay; for that would have meant taking a decided stand against its leaders and giving up its favorite prejudices.

Christ now characterized the wavering attitude of the people by likening it to the conduct of the incautious owner of the house freed from a tyrannical intruder. Instead of taking precautions, the heedless man does everything to court a new invasion. The evil spirit, according to Christ's words, upon reconnoitering, finds the house "empty," that is to say, he discovers that neither the owner nor anybody else is watching it and that he can enter without the least difficulty. Moreover, he finds that the house is "swept and garnished," in other words, its cleanliness and furniture make it look very inviting.

What did the Savior mean by this cleanliness and furniture? He certainly could not have had reference to the supernatural purity of the soul and the gifts of grace which adorn the justified man. For by the house He designated the nation of Israel and all the individual members thereof who were unwilling to accept His grace and would not even pay attention to the last sign He was to give them, the sign of Jonas, of which He had spoken before. Therefore, He had in view those who lacked faith and with it all supernatural gifts. Moreover, the intruder who is about to regain possession of the house, since he wants to enjoy all its com-

forts, does not intend to make it uninhabitable by soiling it and destroying the furniture. But Satan, when entering a soul, soils it with the filth of sin and destroys all the supernatural gifts in it. And, finally, supernatural purity and supernatural gifts displease the evil spirit, while the cleanliness and furniture of which the Savior speaks look inviting to Satan.

Consequently we must follow the explanation of St. Cyril of Alexandria, which is generally accepted by Catholic exegetes, and say that Satan finds the house "swept with the brooms of malice," which remove only the virtues, and that it is garnished with the furniture of pride, infidelity, immorality, and other vices. Applying this explanation to the Isrealites, we understand what the Lord meant. The Pharisees and Sadducees had, indeed, swept the house of Israel with the "brooms of malice"; for the spirit they were promoting among the people did away with all genuine religiousness and made them proud, lacking in submission to God, averse to every idea of conversion and to higher supernatural aims and aspirations. Moreover, they were garnishing the house with those superfluous and even unreasonable and extremely harmful observances which only fostered the vices and rendered men earthly-minded, rebels against God and His Messias. The spirit they promoted made the souls of men very comfortable dwelling places for the powers of hell.

Application. Christ's words apply to every soul. It is not enough to drive the devil out by breaking with a

sin or evil habit; we must let the Savior into our souls by the practice of prayer and of virtues opposed to the faults and bad habits to which we were addicted. If, for instance, we have been given to pride and are resolved now to keep the devil of pride out of our souls, we must be on our guard against the temptations to pride and keep Christ in our souls by prayer and the practice of humility.

The same applies to the direction of souls and to education. We shall never effect a lasting cure from intemperance merely by making the inebriate take the "pledge," nor from the habit of impurity by explaining to the victims of this vice its ravages, but we must make them pray, frequent the sacraments, avoid the occasions of sin and practice mortifications. The refractory child will never become obedient if we merely punish him when caught in an act of disobedience or insolence; we must help him by giving him occasions to practice obedience and submission. In short, negative spirituality, which merely tries to avoid or prevent sin, is a grave mistake. True spirituality is positive, even in the means it proposes and the motives it suggests, all of which must concern not only the sins and vices to be avoided, but the opposite virtues to be practiced. It will never do merely to destroy false and low ideals; we must set up true and noble ones in their stead.

III. THE DEVIL SECURE IN HIS POSSESSION. "Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there;

and the last state of that man is made worse than the first. So shall it be also to this wicked generation." The last words of the parable contain a double warning; one about the fatal results of the half-heartedness of the people, the other about the necessity of a speedy decision. Concerning the first, the Savior told His hearers that they had to decide not between following Him and remaining in their present condition, but between Him and the evil spirit, between eternal salvation and eternal ruin. He again couched His ideas in the form of a parable, saying that the evil spirit would return with seven others more wicked than himself, take possession of the house, and render every further expulsion impossible. He thereby intimated that the whole power of hell, with all its fury and all its terrors, which He indicated by the number seven, would retain a firm hold on the nation and its individuals, if they did not accept the only one who could drive out and keep out the formidable foe. Every chance for a deliverance would be out of the question. Having thus become once more the prey of the devil, their last state would be much worse than their first.

Christ also urged a speedy decision. He told the people that Satan had already reconnoitered and had discovered that all was most favorable for an immediate invasion. He warned them in these awful words: "So shall it be also to this wicked generation." After this warning He withdrew from Israel, but tarried for some time among them, waiting, so to speak, for the effect of His words. But He no longer devoted His principal

work to the people; His chief attention from now on was given to the training of His Apostles and the organization of His Church.

His prophecy about the return of the evil spirit accompanied by seven other spirits more wicked than himself began to be fulfilled very soon. From this time He spoke to the people almost exclusively in obscure parables. On the other hand the opposition against Him increased all the while. It forced Him out of Galilee and finally into concealment. Then came the great battle between the leaders and the Savior during the last week of His life on earth, and though, as we shall see, He remained the victor, His victory was followed by His death on the cross. Israel, as a nation, within less than a year's time fell completely under the control of the evil spirit and the seven other spirits worse than himself. Very soon the people began to be misled by visionaries and pseudo-Messiases, and finally the Roman legions under Vespasian and Titus completed the work of destruction. Even to this day the Jewish nation suffers under the tyranny of the evil spirit. Only at the closing period of human history will his power be broken and the remnants of Israel saved.

Applications. 1) The words of the Savior and their fulfilment, which we have visibly before our eyes, must be for us a serious warning never to turn a deaf ear to the call of grace, be it an invitation to a more perfect state or to greater sanctity in the state which we have chosen. Let us frequently renew our resolution to fol-

low the divine inspirations. Holy Church sees fit to warn us every day in the divine office: "Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Let us pray for the grace to follow God's inspirations conscientiously.

2) This pericope throws a sad light on the Savior's position in Israel. With what readiness and good will ought He and His message to have been received, and yet, how poor was the response with which He met, how ungratefully was He dealt with. Can we wonder if our poor words and efforts for the salvation of souls meet with a similar reception? Ought we to feel offended when we are privileged to share in the cross of the Savior?

COLLOQUY. Express your gratitude for having been freed by Christ from the dominion of the devil. Ask pardon for all neglect of divine inspirations and all half-heartedness in Christ's service. Entreat the grace of not being rejected by God and delivered into the hands of the enemy. "Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Ps. 50,13).

Meditation 26

CHRIST'S RECEPTION BY ISRAEL

(Matt. 11,2–12,45; Meditations 14–25)

After having considered the details given by the Evangelist of the reception Christ and His message

met with from Israel, let us now review the narrative after the manner of a group picture. The attentive reader will find that this section of the first gospel has three distinct parts, each of which consists of three elements. In the first part the sacred author exhibits the Savior as accredited by the prophets, the Baptist and His own works, but neglected by Israel, which He condemns, therefore, as worse than Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrha. In the second part we see the kindness and condescension of Christ, meek and humble of heart. We see Him trying to free the people from the yoke of Pharisaism, but being requited with a plot against His life, we see Him compelled at length to announce to the ungrateful nation that salvation will be taken from them and offered to the Gentiles, who will accept it with gratitude. In the third part St. Matthew, by quoting the Savior's own words, pictures the attitude of the three classes of persons in Israel opposed to the Lord, and gives the judgment which He pronounces against them. They are, first, the impassioned blasphemers, who accuse Christ of being in league with Beelzebub and who, on account of their unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, will not be forgiven either in this life or in the next; secondly, the frivolous Scribes who demand a sign in the heavens and in answer are promised only the sign of Jonas, but refused every further manifestation of Christ's power, besides being warned that in the final judgment they will be put to shame by the Ninivites and the pagan queen of the south; and finally the half-hearted mass of the people who, loth to choose

between the Messias and His enemies, are warned that they will become the prey of the evil spirit and the seven spirits more wicked than he and through their neglect to choose Christ end miserably.

Let us ask for the grace not to waste God's blessings, not to requite His kindness with ingratitude and unfaithfulness.

I. CHRIST'S CREDENTIALS REJECTED (Matt. 11, 2–24; Meditations 14–17). The forerunner of the Messias performed the duties of his office for the last time when he sent a delegation to Christ and in the presence of a large multitude put to Him the all-important question: "Art thou he that art to come?" Jesus, thus solemnly interrogated, replied by pointing to the numerous miracles He was then performing, thereby giving a double proof for His dignity, the fulfilment of prophecies and the working of miracles. By asking the people for what purpose they had gone into the desert when John was preaching there, and by proclaiming the dignity of the Baptist, He again implicitly asserted His own Messianic mission and warned His audience against the machinations of their leaders. He went on to expose the perverseness of the Israelites, who objected to the Baptist on account of his austere life and to Himself for not doing what they blamed in the Baptist. He upbraided the cities of Galilee for not accepting His message despite His numerous miracles to which they were constant witnesses. He threatened them that on the day of judgment they would fare worse than the

cities which in their estimation were the most profligate on God's earth.

This threat was indeed the last means left to the Savior. For the Israelites had refused to heed the prophets, who bade them watch for the fulfilment of the prophecies and draw the obvious conclusion; they had silenced the last and greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, by co-operating with the Herodians in his capture and imprisonment; they had responded to Christ's own words with frivolous demands, shallow mockery, and blasphemous calumnies. Even those who accepted His miracles saw in them but an easy manner to be freed from physical suffering or welcomed them as occasions for noisy demonstrations. For more than a thousand years God had prepared Israel for the day of the Messias with marvelous wisdom and condescension. Yahweh had liberated the sons of Abraham from Egyptian slavery and raised them to the dignity of His bondsmen, not only that they might preserve the faith in the One True God and the coming Redeemer, but also that they might receive the Messias, become charter-members of His Kingdom and enjoy the privilege of introducing the reign of the Son of David into the rest of the world. But as in the past their forefathers had frequently become untrue to their great calling, so now they themselves failed and were willing to fail absolutely in their sacred duty. The Israel of Christ's time is one of the most horrible examples of a nation and of individuals becoming untrue to their vocation and wilfully casting to the winds graces which, had they been

given to those whom they in their conceit treated with contempt, would have resulted in wonderful fruits of virtue and holiness.

Applications. 1) God as a rule leads individuals as well as nations to their appointed goal by a long and truly astonishing preparation. As the appearance of the Baptist, and still more that of Christ Himself, was for the Israelites a divine call to rouse themselves from spiritual lethargy and bethink themselves of their vocation, so the world-moving, epoch-making events and changes of our own time are for all a warning to ponder seriously the purpose of our existence and act accordingly. The history of mankind not only before, but also after Christ, must be viewed from the standpoint of the divine preparation for the day of final salvation and reprobation. Let us not make the fatal mistake of considering political, economic, and social development and retrogression merely with the eyes of the diplomat, statesman, businessman, and sociologist, who leave God and Christ and man's true destiny out of the reckoning.

2) What is true about the life of the human race and of the nations, holds good also for the life of every individual. When we review the graces "with which God hath prevented us" from the beginning of the world, and which He more than doubled after we had become members of the Church and of our sacred state, we must be filled with sincere gratitude. Let us, therefore, pour

out our hearts in fervent thanksgiving. But let us also examine our past life and our present state in order to discover whether and in how far Christ has reason to say to us: "If in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes." Let us make acts of sorrow and serious resolutions of amendment and entreat the divine help.

II. CHRIST'S KINDNESS REQUITED WITH INGRATITUDE (Matt. 11,25–12,21; Meditations 18–21). The second part of this section begins with the touching prayer in which Christ praises the Eternal Father for the poor success of His work and expresses His loving willingness to be received only by "little ones." After proclaiming His divinity He extends a kind invitation to every troubled soul to come to Him, because He is meek and humble of heart, will surely give rest to them, and impose only an easy law instead of the heavy yoke of Pharisaism now pressing upon the neck of the people. Next we hear how the Pharisees interpellated Christ because His Apostles plucked ears of corn on the Sabbath and how they were told that, according to the Mosaic code and the natural law, the disciples did not violate the Sabbatic rest, and that Christ was the Lord of the Sabbath. In proof of this claim He healed the man with the withered hand. The Pharisees, however, far from being convinced, now countered by consulting about a way to kill Him. Hereupon Christ retired, followed by many and healing all the sick brought to Him,

but forbidding the people to make His dignity known. The Evangelist concludes this second part by showing how this meekness and modesty had been foretold by Isaias as a sure sign of the Messias; but he does not fail to quote also the words in which the prophet predicts the conversion of the Gentiles: "In His name the Gentiles shall hope."

How much condescending patience with men, how much loving submission to God, how much compassion with His blinded compatriots is described in the twenty-seven verses which compose this part. The Pharisees resolved to kill Jesus because by His mere words He had healed a poor sufferer on the Sabbath. But He, who could annihilate them with less than a word, chooses to retreat before them, continuing to heal many on this humble flight, but "charging them not to make him known." Yet Israel is impervious and prefers the tyranny of the Pharisees to the kindness of Christ.

Applications. 1) Let us make acts of love and atonement to the Sacred Heart. Let us recall to mind that He still makes to every man the offer to be his guide on the hard road through life, to relieve him of many a burden which his fellow-men press upon his shoulders, burdens which for reasons of wisdom and kindness Christ decides not to take away, but for bearing which He promises help and strength. He still keeps His promise as faithfully as ever. We have but to think of the morality, justice, charity which He has brought into the world. For what ills and grievances does His Church

not offer relief in her teaching, her government, her institutions? For all indeed, except those to which man clings pertinaciously and for which he refuses to accept remedy and relief. Let us love and trust our good Master; let us thank Him from the depth of our hearts.

2) Must not the love, the modesty, the patience we admire in our Savior, be a mighty stimulus for us to remain true to Him and with a holy pride to carry the cross with Him? But, oh, the shame, how frequently do we accept a burden which the world puts upon us as though it were a matter of course, while a small sacrifice for Christ seems too hard.

3) The Pharisees who planned Christ's destruction because He proved His dignity and the justice of His claims, have many imitators in our "civilized" world. They try to kill the mystic Christ, or His mystic body, the Church; they attempt morally to destroy the real Christ by undermining faith in His divinity; they try to ruin His power by preaching and practicing rebellion against His dominion and by persuading men to set His most fundamental laws at naught. They want to save and elevate society without Him. Even the mentally unsound Jacobin of the French Revolution who signed himself as "the personal enemy of Jesus Christ," has his imitators in our day. Let us renew the promise of our undying fealty to Christ the King, and do our share in working for the spread of His Kingdom.

III. CHRIST OPPOSED BY ALL THE POWERS OF PASSION AND ALL THE WEAKNESSES OF EFFEMINACY (Matt. 12, 22–45; Meditations 22–25). In the third part of this section the Evangelist tells us that the Pharisees after the cure of the blind and dumb demoniac spread the accusation that the Savior worked His miracles with the aid of Beelzebub. How patiently Christ refuted the blasphemous charge! But then, rising to the dignity of the God-Man, He declared that every one who was not with Him, was against Him, and that every religious leader who did not work under His direction, was ruining souls. But since Israel, as a whole, complied with Christ's demands neither in the days of the Savior nor while the Apostles continued His work in Palestine, the sacred author, writing when on the point of departure from the Holy Land, sees fit to insert here also the sentence which Christ pronounced on unbelievers. It is yet another effort of St. Matthew to bring the Jews to a better frame of mind. Among the unbelievers the Savior distinguished three classes. The worst and the most stubborn of His enemies were those who by their hatred and pride were carried so far against their better knowledge as to attribute Christ's miracles to Beelzebub, thus rendering themselves guilty of "the sin against the Holy Ghost." Of them Christ said that they would find pardon neither in this life nor in the next, but must expect the most severe condemnation in that judgment in which not even an idle word would remain unpunished. The second class consisted of those who, sadly lacking in the seriousness with which religious

affairs must be treated, tried to lower the Son of God to the level of a public performer by insinuating to Him that He work a sign in the heavens. The Savior replied that the only sign He would work for them was that of Jonas. But, as they would refuse to heed even this last great and impressive warning, He foretold that, on the day of reckoning, they would be put to shame even by the lascivious Ninivites and the pagan queen of the south. While the representatives of the first two classes were found among the leaders of Israel, the members of the third class belonged chiefly to the mass of the people, who were brow-beaten and cowed by the Pharisees. They listened to Christ's words, assented half-heartedly to them, brought their sick and demoniacs to Him, at times even gave Him an ovation, and many of them might have accepted the Gospel had not their fear of the Pharisees and their unwillingness to part with favorite prejudices kept them back. They never realized the full import of Christ's preaching and miracles, the seriousness of their situation, and the necessity of coming to a definite conclusion and making a deliberate choice. These Christ tried to rouse when He spoke of the evil spirit wandering about in dry places and returning to the house accompanied by seven other spirits more wicked than himself. Thus strong passions, as hatred, pride, fanaticism, nationalistic conceit; and moral weaknesses, as shallowness, want of seriousness, timidity, indecision, proved an insurmountable obstacle to the Savior and combined to make Israel a "wicked generation." It was the fanatics who conceived the idea of

murdering Him. The shallow worldlings at first merely shrugged their shoulders at Him and treated Him like a performer, but gradually they were won over to the wicked designs of the fanatics. The mass of the common people, despite a good beginning, lacked moral strength to take the necesssary further steps. Thus they were finally drawn into the opposition and demanded the crucifixion of the Savior.

Applications. 1) This third part depicts the powers which fight against Christ in the world today. The "children of the world" neglect Him superciliously, as long as He does not interfere with their aims. But if He does, they resort to violence; for as a rule they, and not the fanatics, are the holders of power in human society. But the fanatics, those blinded by religious aberrations, sectarian passions, and ultra-nationalistic tendencies, always seek quarrels. They are propagandists who attack everybody who does not belong to them and oppose everything that does not fit into their system. Their weapons are of a more spiritual nature; but they do not spurn a confederation with the shallow world, if the world will lend them its power. The mass of the people is influenced by both these parties; but left to itself, it is not inaccessible to the truth. Yet woe to these simple folk if they fall into the hands of bad leaders and find not the moral strength to view the truth with an unbiased mind and the courage to embrace it! Here is a wide field for the lay apostolate. In our age it is the Catholic laity that must win the masses for

Christ; and it is our sacred duty to promote the lay apostolate.

2) The religious and moral condition of the masses repeats itself in a way in each individual soul, with this difference that a man's inborn passions, above all his predominating fault, take the place of the fanatics, and his inborn moral weakness and indecision in moral matters that of the world. Both the predominating passion and the predominating weakness in each individual combine together and form what ascetics style his predominant fault. If he, like the mass of the Israelitic people, is afraid to resist and overcome this fault, he can never entirely belong to Christ and is liable to suffer great moral harm, lead a life which is very unprofitable for eternity, nay, become an enemy of the Savior. Let us not neglect our predominant fault.

3) The efforts we see Christ making to save Israel are an apt illustration of the doctrine that God desires to save all men. This truth must fill us with great confidence. It does not require superhuman efforts to reach Heaven.

4) The realization that so much of Christ's love and kindness is wasted on the world should urge us to "fulfill our duty of worthy satisfaction to the Sacred Heart." Pope Pius XI pleads for this service of atonement most eloquently in his encyclical "Miserentissimus Deus."

COLLOQUY. Let us make an act of reparation to the Sacred Heart, a profession of loyalty to Christ the King, and an oblation of our persons and of all we are and possess to the loving Redeemer of our souls. Let us pray for love, strength, and grace always to be faithful to Him. "Permit me not to be separated from Thee; from the wicked foe defend me." "Sweet Heart of Jesus, be my love."

A.M.D.G.

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